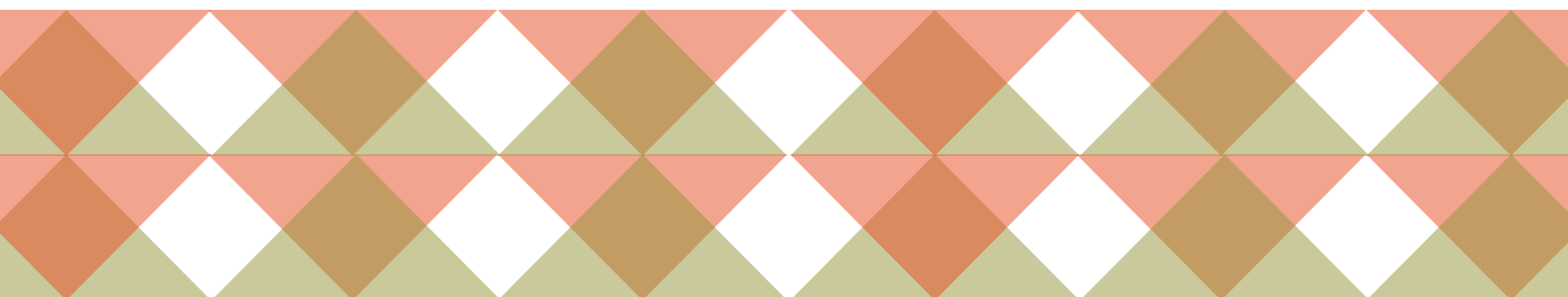


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# HEROINES

## The new **HEROINES** collective

Life stories, narrative anthology and art works inspired by them.



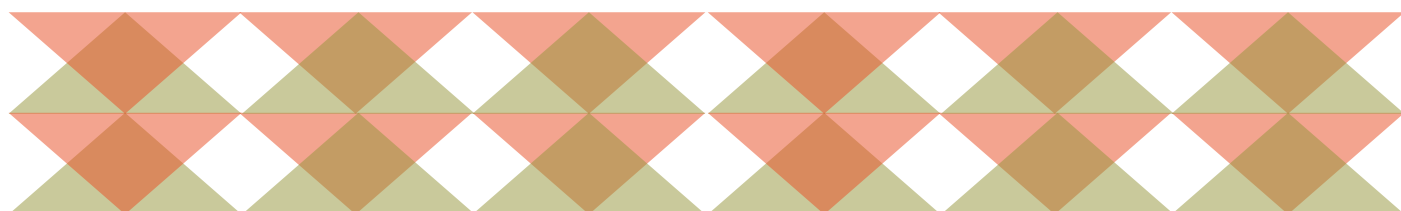
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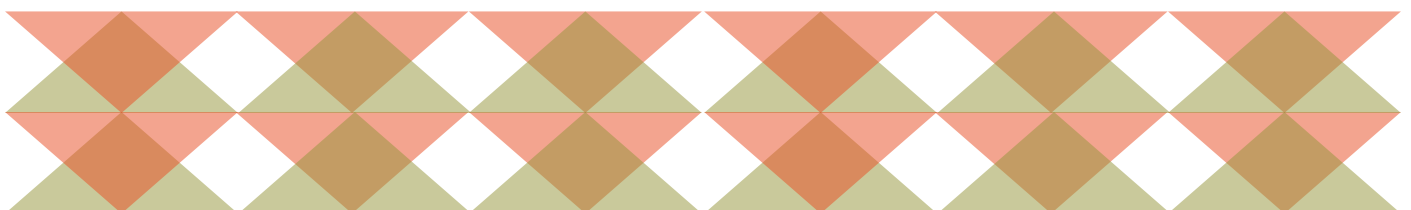
# HEROINES

## INDEX



Introduction to New Heroines Collective .....	6
Oliwer Korhonen from Finland .....	8
New Heroine A from Slovenia.....	10
<b>Ρούλα B from Greece</b> .....	<b>11</b>
New Heroine A from Spain .....	12
Collaborative poems from Greece .....	13
• A perfect day ... ..	13
• At first.....	13
• Team .....	13
Jenna Karjalainen from Finland.....	14
New Heroine B from Slovenia.....	17
Έβα Ζωή B from Greece.....	18
New Heroine B from Spain.....	19
HEROINES Poems from Finland.....	19
• Magic Box, <i>Oliwer Korhonen</i> .....	19
• Magic Box, <i>Mimi</i> .....	20
• Bird, <i>Jenna Karjalainen</i> .....	21
• Twin Sister, <i>Virva Tyrväinen</i> .....	21
• Abuse, <i>Virva Tyrväinen</i> .....	21
• Diary, <i>Virva Tyrväinen</i> .....	22
• Arriving, <i>Virva Tyrväinen</i> .....	22
• Herald, <i>Riitta</i> .....	22

• What can the trees teach? <i>Riitta</i> .....	22
Pirjo Repo from Finland .....	23
New Heroine C from Slovenia.....	25
Δέσποινα Π from Greece .....	26
New Heroine C from Spain.....	28
Collaborative poems from Spain .....	28
• It is Worth.....	29
• Childhood Memories .....	29
Riitta from Finland .....	30
New Heroine D from Slovenia .....	33
Μαρία Μ from Greece.....	34
New Heroine D from Spain .....	35
Collaborative Poems from Slovenia .....	36
• A Woman .....	36
• A Moment on the Path .....	36
• Life, <i>Suzana Macun</i> .....	37
Virva Tyrväinen from Finland .....	38
New Heroine E from Slovenia.....	39
Ελένη Α from Greece .....	40
New Heroine E from Spain.....	42
New Heroine F from Spain.....	42
• Our Song: Her-We, <i>Spanish Heroines</i> .....	42
• The Beauty of the End, <i>Spanish Heroines</i> .....	43
Art works inspired by the HEROINES' writings .....	44
• Art works from Greece.....	44
• Art works from Slovenia.....	48
• Art works from Spain.....	56
• Art works from Finland .....	62
• Art works from United Kingdom .....	66





## Introduction to New Heroines Collective

In the following pages, twenty-one participant writers in the HEROINES project generously share their background and experiences. The project has taken place in four countries: Finland, Greece, Slovenia and Spain and the new heroines have written as members of various communities, religions, beliefs, family positions and occupations.

These differences find their way into the moving and open way in which the participants tell stories of themselves, each one placing their individual mark on the journeys that have brought them to the HEROINES project. Reading and re-reading these accounts is a humbling experience - for the endurance of difficult, often painful, experiences and times when that endurance may not have seemed possible.

That these new heroines have endured and are able to open their lives to share with others is a testament of persistence and care, that they can recognise their positions as 'New Heroines' through this is a statement of self-belief and hopefulness - hope that can be shared with others who may be waiting their time to become new heroines themselves.

Women finding reassurance and encouragement from the experience of each other is the central idea behind the structure of this project that begins with sharing of life stories to then tell our own. In doing so, we may feel more acknowledged, less alone and see ourselves and our abilities in a more positive way. These accounts show that there are ways to survive and that tools, such as therapeutic writing, can strengthen that survival.

The New Heroines' accounts have been made visible through their participation in the HEROINES project. The creative writing in this document is a mark of their survival and strength. They take different forms and use words with power and impact. Some pieces are short and stark, others are stories that hold worlds of experiences, some show humour. All of the pieces show courage and give to us readers a sense of great privilege. The group poems have a special presence in this collection, showing the range of participants background experiences, vision and imagination combines with skilled encouragement of facilitators, to demonstrate the work of therapeutic writing groups at their best.

You can find the complete New Heroines anthology in English, Spanish, Slovenian, Greek and Finnish into the narrative collection section of the Heroines' website: [www.heroines-project.eu/the-narrative-collection](http://www.heroines-project.eu/the-narrative-collection).

*The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



## Oliwer Korhonen from Finland

*“Time is money, money is rubbish, rubbish is crap, and crap never ends.”*

### **Brief biography**

I was born in Vehmersalmi as the youngest child on the farm. My value base was very conservative. Nature was close to my heart thanks to home education. I went to high school in Kuopio, and from there, I went to work in prison as a security guard.

I then planned on becoming a priest. During my working years, the power of God had weakened (I came to my senses) and I had become an atheist. In the late 2000's, I had an accident in prison, after which I moved to Pieksämäki for retraining.

A couple of years later, I became ill with a serious mental illness that brought extreme symptoms and severe episodes involving incisions, writing with my own blood, and recklessness. Sometimes I was put in an isolation room. I had constant delusions, and living with them brought such anxiety that my philosophy of life was limited to one word: “survival”.

I have received support from my family, from the psychiatry outpatient clinic and from various schools. They have arranged things when I have solicited them, for example, not being left alone. I still live in Pieksämäki and have slowly recovered somewhat, but I am still unable to work. In my youth, teachers were important to me, walking side by side with me; later also my workmates and schoolmates. Today I live alone and have many pals, but only one friend.

Reading has always been difficult due to dyslexia, but since I got sick, I have written a lot, for example, diaries and emails. I like comics, such as Calvin and Hobbes and the Finnish Fingerpori and Kamala Luonto (Terrible Nature). I also like Star Wars movies and the Game of Thrones fantasy series. In photographic art, Valhalla's photographs by local photographer Jone Matilainen have been important to me.

### **The Heroines Process**

The Heroines group, which began last autumn, has broadened my view of myself and of the world. It has been great to realise that I'm not alone with these problems.

Groupwork took me some time, as it doesn't come naturally to me, but I have learned to be a group person. I suppose I have gained courage. Now I dare to say boldly how I feel at any given



moment, whereas in the past, I wanted to cover all my emotions behind a wall. Now I talk a little bit about them to others.

The writing exercises have generally been good and understandable, and if I have asked for a more detailed explanation, I have received one. During this writing group period, I have gone through gender transitioning. Although this group was only for women, I did not experience a contradiction here; I experienced everything as a woman, in the sense that womanhood has always been a part of me.

The group has been a great way to address my own gender identity. I am ready to make these things public and I hope that I can help others who wrestle with the same things. Tarita Ikonen, one of the role models in the Heroines group whose life stories we discussed, has also written about her gender identity. Her texts were interesting, very strong and tough - something you can identify with. Now, at the end of May, fatigue has set in, and the last couple of gatherings have felt pretty heavy because the "course" is really long and everything causes me turmoil.

To those who are considering joining the Heroines group, I would say: Do it! Poetry therapy has a strange power to broaden your perspective. You learn something new about yourself when you dare to throw yourself in. And peer support is a plus. Many times we arrived at the meeting room well before the group started and had time for valuable discussion.

Another benefit of the group is that you must commit to it also when it's a bad day; you just have to go and get something done. The more you read and write through these regular meetings, the more you understand how important it is, which also helps. Now that I have written weekly, I notice how it makes me feel better.

## New Heroine A from Slovenia

I can tell for myself that I have always loved being surrounded by people I deal with, sharing my experiences, adventures, feelings, so I particularly like being challenged to participate in the group. I admit, my feelings were initially mixed; although I like to talk about myself, even though I like to accept some new challenges, I was in a cramp: I was afraid that I would not be able to express myself correctly, that I would not properly understand and carry out the tasks assigned. With each workshop, however, I became more courageous, relaxed, for which I must thank both the mentors who knew how to relax me and encourage me to think, as well as the other participants who faced the same fears as me before starting the workshop.

I've never had any reservations about my youth, in front of anyone, but I have to admit, I've never thought about it as deeply as I do now, during socializing at workshops. It's interesting how any new technique can achieve in a human being to remember an event, an emotion that's been in a pale, blurry shadow for a while, and now it's here again. Maybe I didn't want to think about it? Maybe I wasn't hoping? The stories that other participants told about themselves were so different from mine, and yet I found something in common with them, and when I listened to them, I saw that I was not alone in my grief. Yes, I can tell you that since I was 15 years old, I'm mostly sad, depressed because I lost my mother at an early stage, taking care of my siblings...as a Roma we were separated from the other children in schools, and we also had a problem with transport. Just when I thought my sadness had finally left me, a new, powerful one emerged, which I didn't get rid of until today. This one literally settled into me when my husband, with whom I had a great marriage, died. I lost my best friend by death, I lost myself. I'm happy to be surrounded by my daughter and granddaughter; if it would not be like this I would not be able to cope with the situation.

Sadness, however, thanks to God, is increasingly being replaced by some satisfaction, it is a joy to see that my goodness is coming back. Everyone I've helped, they're faithfully standing by me with advice, with closeness, with kind, encouraging words, they make me feel like I'm loved, that I'm worthy, that I'm not alone. I also got that feeling in the group, so I couldn't wait for every subsequent workshop over and over again, because I felt relief in myself when I spoke again and again about my dark past. In the group, I felt safe, I trusted my darkest thoughts, the feelings I may not have shared with anyone before. The girls also gave me a new impetus when confronted with the notion that I should not always forget myself, which I have been doing until now, when I have been in the care of happiness, the achievement of others' goals...

Now that I'm finally starting to try to put myself at the centre, I'm going to trust my greatest desire right now, namely, to go to the seaside. I'm afraid I'm too lonely, too lost, so I'd like to invite my friends with me. I imagine walking by the sea, seeing myself smiling, happy, just thinking about it, telling my friends in the group that my eyes glow, that I'm a different person. Can I do it?

## Πούλα Β from Greece

**Dear Indecisive**

I greet you and invite you to join the group.

In every decision there needs to be thought and strength.

But I wonder:

Which fear and which anxiety can keep you away from us and from your participation?

Which hesitation will keep you from growing wings to reach higher goals and dreams?

Which cowardice stands in front of you and prevents you from getting to know yourself?

Come... come with us and we will spread our wings and clear ourselves from the problems that we consider personal and unsolved in our lives.

When opportunities arise to expand our goals into desire for a change of course, we usually need a nudge.

Come to our group, trembling bird.

Spread your wings and embrace us.

We need you to turn indecisiveness into strength,

And the need for expression into creativity.

## New Heroine A from Spain

### Brief biography

I started getting sick when I was 12 years old and my psychiatrist diagnosed me with schizophrenia. I had to enter the University Clinical Hospital and my psychiatrist gave me a treatment to be able to move on and not enter there again.

She told me that I had a chronic disease, I was going to have schizophrenia for all my life. I have to take my medicines in order not to re-enter the hospital again. I feel good when I take my treatment and I have a normal life.

I went through bad times, but there is a happy end, despite everything that I have lived.

I attend to the different activities offered by INTRAS, I really enjoy my social life and feel very happy.

I am a Heroine because I learnt how to prepare my meals, clean my house and being independent.



## Collaborative poems from Greece

### A perfect day ...

A perfect day sun and sea  
 I went for a walk without stress, bright and confident  
 to find the imperfection of today's perfection.  
 I sat in a cafe by the sea  
 and I sang with friends  
 I am full of joy and happy.  
 I took a boat and opened up to the sea  
 I am not afraid of anything with a heart full of love  
 let this moment not end

### At first...

she was skeptical, closed, stunted-stressed. Thirsty for learning, she is searching for herself.  
 Entering the group, she feels safe and secure through experiential knowledge. The meeting with the fellow travelers was valuable, fruitful, creative, interesting. It will be unforgettable in her mind, heart, like the first grade of elementary school.  
 On the way she met challenges, she felt fear and terror, but despite being a little timid,  
 She moved on... she recognized them, she faced them, ...she became stronger.  
 She recognized her weaknesses and strengths. How easily our weaknesses became strengths!

### Team

Our story begins together  
 we tune in to a common goal  
 like a clenched fist  
 completion is given  
 The strength in unity  
 Powerful result will give

## Jenna Karjalainen from Finland

*“There are no hopeless cases. Not me, not you, not anybody!”*



Jenna loves nature & photography

### Brief biography

I was born in Varkaus in 1989, with the umbilical cord making three turns around the neck. My mother developed postpartum depression and she told my father that she had to choose between herself or the child. My dad has been the most important person in my life. He worked in a car repair shop. It was sad to visit my mother.

I experienced bullying at school right from the start. In 2001, I moved to Pieksämäki when I was in the fifth grade. The bullying increased and I started using alcohol as well as gradually drugs. Already in the fifth grade, I tried suicide by jumping from the roof of an apartment building. The police picked me up, thankfully. In the seventh grade, the whole school was already bullying me and calling me a junkie, but my drug addict friends protected me from the bullies.

I have been in a psychiatric hospital nine times; the first time I was in the seventh grade. The first treatment was successful. It lasted just under half a year; I was diagnosed with ADHD and a

substance abuse problem. In later periods of hospital and institutional care, I was actually mistreated, for example, the doctor ordering me to kill myself. And during my stay at a youth home, all my will was defeated, such as by not being allowed to wear my own clothes or listen to music - complaints have been made about that place which have fortunately led to action.

In my teens, the closest people were my dad, grandma and grandpa. It was difficult to maintain friendships given the institutional course of my life. Most of my friends died; they killed each other, took overdoses or had accidents. One of my friends was middle-aged Maukka. He took care of me and even cleaned my apartment sometimes.

My son was born in 2008. His father was an alcoholic but did not use any other drugs. I got postpartum depression. I tried to make it but when the baby was 5 months old, he was taken into custody. It was a relief because I couldn't have taken care of the child back then.

My child's father has been the best of my partners so far, he has not been violent towards me. We are still in touch sometimes. I am able to meet my son nowadays, though the supervisor is always present at the meetings. During my years of drug usage, it was not possible to meet him. He lives with his father's brother, where he has an amazing home. Still, the boy loves me. It is touching how important we are to each other. I love my son immensely.

In my later romantic relationships, I was beaten numerous times. They have tried to kill me and persecute me. I met my last boyfriend in 2014. By that time, I had been admitted to a substitution treatment. He realized how important it is to treat ADHD. Finally, I found a doctor who didn't consider me hopeless. I got medication and it started to help.

In my relationship, on the other hand, things did not go in the right direction. I married my boyfriend too soon. The situation worsened immediately after this: mental violence was constant, subtle, first difficult to understand and then difficult to explain. I received death threats, cruel and sadistic treatment, and assaults occurred numerous times.

Fortunately, I have now been able to move into my own home and escape violence. I have been feeling much better now that I get to be alone. The key insight for myself has been that the "narcissist doesn't need to argue with anyone but themselves". Separating from him has been difficult because his parents have taken good care of me. I have been able to tell them things. My husband's daughter is also important to me. I would not want to lose her either. There are important people in my life, and many have accepted me as I am.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to change my life and find faith. I have quit drugs; there have been no relapses for six years. I like children, nature and animals. I believe all artistic activities help: music, painting, photography and writing. Religiosity has made a decisive change in my life. During my addiction years, I started praying. Thanks to my substitution treatment and ADHD medication, I was able to start reading and listen to the Bible. The Bible comforts, reminds,



encourages, extends, teaches, and nurtures. Thanks to it, I could discard the bad models of conduct. I didn't want to do that anymore. Values and attitudes changed and the landscape of my mind changed from negativity and pessimism to optimism. I realized that evil does not happen by its mere evil.

I have a desire to help other people. I am writing my Hulttiotyön blogi (the blog of the Reckless Girl). I made this blog with my own name and picture. Soon, feedback and popularity came: my site has already nearly 2,000,000 visitors. It has been rewarding to be contacted by readers who want to break free from drugs. The purpose of this blog is to bring hope. I started writing it while I was using the stuff; I thought that it would be good for people to know what a junkie's life is like. I have written to readers and talked to them over the phone. Bringing out spirituality is particularly important to me. I wouldn't have gotten out of drugs on my own. It would be difficult to understand the suffering of others without experiencing it yourself. I thought I was a hopeless case. To God, nobody is hopeless.

In addition to the blog, I have written diaries, stories, and short stories for as long as the pen has remained in my hand. I have written both at the institutions and at home - the one accompanying thing that has been therapeutic. My childhood diaries have disappeared, but later diaries have been preserved. I have a dream of writing a book from my experiences.

### **The Heroines Process**

The Heroines group has been important to me. Confidence arose in me right from the start. There I wrote more than just violence stories. I got to try different styles of writing and read a lot of different literature over the winter.

I don't know how things would have gone if I hadn't tried this group. It has helped me to set boundaries, express my identity and my own will. My trampled self-esteem has begun to heal. I have got more strength and mercy, as well as new friends and acquaintances. It is meaningful. Poetry therapy has helped me to realize that I have survived. My will and my identity are still there; they have not been taken away from me. Defending them is my right.

I encourage people to join groups like this and dare to face themselves and their own brokenness. It is a prerequisite for recovery. You should come along, even if it scares you. There should be more of these groups for traumatized people. In them, you learn to find yourself in a new way, and this helps with recovery.

One night a vision came to me, a painting idea: there is a broken pot on the ground, out of which raises a budding flower. Even though I have been crushed, I have life, beginnings. I have not been destroyed.



## New Heroine B from Slovenia

### While I...

While I joined the HEROINES project group, I found out about very terrible news. I know my life has always been hitting me, and I've struggled to make a fairly normal life, but this time at my 39s I was additionally hit by incurable disease. I kept hiding the pain I was experiencing, I shared just a fraction to others. I was struck like lightning when the doctor diagnosed me. I can't describe the feeling when the doctor told me that after a while, I might not be able to walk again. It was horrific, I was scared, I panicked. The only thing that was going through my head was, that it's all over now. I faced this disease in this way, so I somehow got the courage and didn't give up. I knew it wouldn't do me any good to feel sorry for myself at home, waiting for me to really stop walking, or to fight. I was also supported by this group, which had been there for me before and was very helpful in entrusting them with my dark moments and also my health problems. I've always liked it in workshops, before I found out about this disease, they encouraged me to look at my life positively, that everything can be solved. I calmed down, relaxed, it was easier. Even if I was in a bad mood before, I felt better after the workshops. But after I found out, there were moments that I was so vulnerable, and I just cried.

I never had to trust this to my best friend, I didn't have to share my grief with anyone, because my wider surroundings knew about it. But my grief has come a long way. My whole childhood was circulated around fear, tears, hopelessness. The whole time, my brothers and I witnessed my father's physical violence against my mother.

Even though I don't live at home anymore, I still live in fear for my mother, I feel helpless and cry a lot. In the group, I've come to the realization that the fact I can confess myself means more than just crying. To speak to others who faithfully listen to me and to feel that I am not alone. With every thought, the sentences I speak, I free myself from the rage, some weight that suffocates me, cramps me. I couldn't relieve myself of that weight myself, so I thank every participant who listened to me. Every workshop, every exercise has awakened in me the will, the power to speak. I loved participating in these workshops and will continue to approach similar workshops in the future.

## ‘Eva Zωή B from Greece

### New Beginning

Generally, in my life I was never short of courage to start new things. I always looked for the **meaning** when doing something. I chose to participate in this specific seminar during these unique social circumstances of isolation due to the pandemic. It was also a distinct stage in my life; I had just moved to your country. Everything was new. I was trying to get on track with the society here...and wham! The quarantine! I was also trying to make sense of my own new meanings in life. I called it a process of redefinition... at the age of 64! I wanted to meet new people, women, people that I had things in common with such as interests and activities. And suddenly everyone disappeared. When I found out from a friend that the seminar had started in November, I was thrilled... at first! More emotions sprang up later, mostly regarding whether I would be accepted, because I was not only an outsider but a foreigner too. As I gradually met the participating Heroines, these feelings were overcome fast. The truth is that I had lived in the big city for many years and hadn't realized what people's, and especially women's, mentalities were in the countryside. Now I know how difficult the circumstances are. Now I know that it's also hard for me to live that way too. I miss my 'lady-crew' when I go out. I miss company in general; outside, with beauty, with art, with joy and actual communication. But I realized that this is just part of my imagination. What I want now is - if I can - to find a place to go and live in, a more 'open' place. A place where I don't have to prove, as often as now, that as a woman I have to be treated equally. I haven't learnt how to knit, but I've learnt to be modest in my writing. I've learnt how to write by not being so scared of words. I've learnt how to find my own words. The nicest thing I was told by one of the Heroines - I'm sorry I don't remember which one it was - was that my writing is identifiable.

## New Heroine B from Spain

### Brief biography

I entered the hospital, on the 11th floor. I am a Heroine because I have fought a lot.

## HEROINES Poems from Finland

### **Magic Box**, *Oliwer Korhonen*

I would put in my magic box  
 The star sparkle from the surface of the water  
 The glow of Darth Vader's sword  
 The laughter of a child in a sickening whirligig

I would put in my magic box  
 Princess Leia's smile pits  
 The roar of a tooth-aching dinosaur  
 The growl of a Ferrari rumbling in a tunnel

I would put in my magic box  
 The tingle of fairies drunk in the park  
 The explosion of the Death Star  
 The scent of dog paws

I would put in my magic box  
 the crushing of a Lego by a naked foot  
 Frostbitten fingers  
 The love brought by ecstasy

My box is fashioned with Yoda blood  
 With Millennium Falcon oil  
 With the dust and invisible energy of the stars

**Magic Box, Mimi**

I would put in the box  
the eye of a peacock butterfly  
the brave colour of a silver-washed fritillary  
the majestic flight of a swallowtail

I would put in the box  
the wistful song of a blackbird  
the nocturnal sigh of an eagle owl  
the echoing call of a gavia arctica

I would put in the box  
a spring concerto among branches  
a torrent of abundant life  
when everyone wakes to the light of the sun

I would put in a box  
afterglow and sunset  
The back of a calm lake  
a rower disappearing into the horizon

When I look at my box  
it is fashioned from pasqueflowers, bluebells and daisies  
it is guarded by a blister beetle with a blue glow  
from there the vesperbats depart for their short night flight

When I look at it  
I remember where I come from  
where I am and where I am going to  
and what is important

**Bird, Jenna Karjalainen**

Yes. The bird was alive.  
 Despite all the darkness and death of the world  
 it survived through the darkness  
 and misery.  
 And the bird sang.  
 Despite everything, it sang.  
 It was not disheartened,  
 even though it could have been  
 It did not give up,  
 because it had not been created  
 to ever give up.

**Twin Sister, Virva Tyrväinen**

9 months of your closeness  
 then transforming into a guardian angel  
 to watch me  
 to give me love  
 the power of life  
 into light and hope

**Abuse, Virva Tyrväinen**

stained and broken  
 disgraced and silenced  
 made to carry the secret  
 to live with one's pain

**Diary, Virva Tyrväinen**

joy and sadness

hope and despair

day and night

taking turns

therapy

for surviving

**Arriving, Virva Tyrväinen**

from port to port

arriving through the storm

grateful, at rest

With Him

**Herald, Riitta**

The trees know

They tell each other

The trees do it

A subterranean network, invisible to us

The trees dare

They face the storm

They don't tell us everything, but they help us find it

Life and connection

**What can the trees teach? Riitta**

- sometimes resting is good and necessary
- it's worth waiting for spring
- you can grow even in a rock's crevice
- there is a place and a time for everybody
- connection is indispensable
- the cycle of life is precious beauty in its every stage

## Pirjo Repo from Finland

“Let all the flowers bloom”



Pirjo (third on the left) made this wall hanging representing the group, which she presented at the group's conclusion.

### Brief biography

I was born in 1960 as the oldest of three children. My childhood was quite happy. My grandparents lived and were part of my family life, and I had my own room where I could make art and handicrafts in peace.

We had a summer cabin where I spent time swimming and reading and took care of my eight years younger sister. I have always been very creative and loved arts and sports. My art and gym teachers have inspired me and given me self esteem. This has guided my career path.

I have studied handicrafts (weaving), many kinds of art, art history and art therapy, swimming and teaching. I think artistic creativity flows in my veins; all my family members are artisans of some kind. I have worked at the psychiatric outpatient clinic of Pieksämäki for a long time, and I have been able to use these skills in my work. I have tried all kinds of functional and art-based methods with my clients, such as dancing, singing, crafts and exercise. We often take walks in nature or use the swimming hall.

Reading has always been an important hobby for me. I enjoy visiting libraries - I learned that from my father, who often took me with him. I have read a lot in my life, and when my children

were born in the eighties, I read them fairy tales.

I like swimming, culture, art and travelling. My favourite country is Italy and I am looking forward to being able to travel there again. When traveling, I always write my journal. I like to write many kinds of texts, and just wish that my writing skills were better.

I live in an old school building with my husband and there I have lots of room for my artistic hobbies. Art is my home too, in a way. I love my work and feel that I am good at it. I have three close friends. My children and grandchildren are very dear to me and I love spending time with them.

### **The Heroines Process**

When the psychiatric outpatient clinic was offered a chance to be part of the Heroines project, I was very excited and started to gather women who might be interested in joining a poetry therapy group. I wanted to join the group myself.

My role in the group was slightly different from that of others, since I was a member of staff and many of the group members are my clients. I made a conscious decision to be just a member among others. I couldn't, however, speak about my past and delicate issues as openly as the other members. The themes we discussed were such that one does not usually think about them.

The group has helped me to deal with painful memories, like the illnesses and deaths of my close ones. I didn't always share the things that I wrote about. The group felt safe to me. Everyone could decide how much they want to participate. There was no pressure and everyone got the time and space that they needed.

The things that the exercises brought up for me were quite heavy sometimes, and dealing with them made me tired. It was good that I had an opportunity to spend time alone after the meetings. I feel great gratitude about the trust and openness I could witness in the group. I am planning to start a similar kind of group next autumn, because I love writing and reading, and this method has impressed me. It would be a pity not to continue.



## New Heroine C from Slovenia

### WHEN I CAME INTO THE GROUP

I'm glad I was invited to the Heroines group workshop. As a newcomer, I felt a bit of fear because it was hard for me to trust, even though we've known each other for years.

The confidence grew from session to session, it was easier every time, and I felt joy because I realised how beautiful it feels to be trusted and you feel relief in yourself. Besides, it's about building confidence and courage.

I've participated within various topics. Every workshop was interesting to me, we talked about life in general, we played some long-forgotten brain games that were fun, where I had my laughter and release. I also realized that workshops can be interesting and original, with tasks for creating a project and that I can write something myself. When I was writing, I felt the pleasure of spilling something original on paper. I also felt proud and happy to be part of the group and be important in some way. The workshop also helped me become more persistent, confident, positive.

Besides, I've also learned that each can be a heroine in her own way and get some ideas for life. The success for me was that, due to illness and the shortening of the programme at school, I didn't get a job anywhere and I was invited into the programme and that I could participate in such workshops. At the end of these workshops, I also realized that we can also look at problems differently, e.g., talk to the person we trust, seek help and think as positively as we can.

However, this has not always been the case. I've been deprived of a lot of things in my life. At elementary school, my classmates teased me and teased me about my appearance and my ability to learn, which was a burden on me. Because I was shy and didn't dare to defend myself. This continued in high school. At that time, it was comforting to have a drink, and having a drink led me to the point where I started hiding, but at the same time, I was also mentally unwell... By the time my mom found out, it was too late, I lost my friends, but that's when I went to get better, albeit with a lot of trouble, I resisted.

Later, I met a boy who my mother eventually accepted. In this relationship, I was the one who adjusted, who always had to say that everything was fine, I always had to be in a good mood and put up with it, I didn't have an opinion. The longer we were together, the worse it got, the more control my life was taken over by this guy we lived with.

I'm living anew now. Now I realized that through the workshops I became more confident, determined, open. I also had the opportunity to show up as a songwriter, to write about my feelings, my life.

Finally, I would just add that I have found success in my life, that I will live again and look forward to every little thing that life gives me.

## Δέσποινα Π from Greece

### **I Welcome Me to the Heroines Group**

While I was in the group...  
 I had a dream that someone gave me a ring  
 The first pilot workshop took place  
 We were quarantined again  
 I stopped writing in my diary  
 Dimitris, Haido and Mr Nodas died  
 Every day I would walk to the olive grove  
 I presented the garden art at Art4more  
 I made Christmas cards  
 I wrote poems  
 I made the robin for the children's celebration  
 I went to Ioannina to my parents' by bus  
 My friend Zikos died  
 I stayed up listening to music  
 I noted down the Erasmus tools  
 My friends separated  
 We made the Carnival statue with the members  
 I did sadhana for forty days  
 I made bread and cookies  
 I'd wake up early in the morning  
 Danae started her internship  
 The online carnival celebration happened at last  
 I took part in many online seminars

The swallows came  
I made four pieces of art for my friend's new house  
I decorated candles with many people  
I sent a box of aquarelle paints to my niece  
I knocked my head on the cupboard  
I had a picnic at Xenia  
I listened to the radio with Panos  
The sparrows made a nest on the balcony  
We sang Good Friday hymns with my mother over the phone  
I followed the Erasmus workshops in English  
I collaborated with many people  
I decided to have the vaccine  
I was given flowers which I planted  
I washed the balconies  
I made flour pie  
The quarantine was over at last  
The measures were relaxed  
We had coffee with Roula  
Panos got the vaccine  
Andreas is going to marry a Turkish girl  
Giannis never called back  
I moved the cupboard with the materials to the ground floor  
Charitakis went to the mountain  
I had my first ice-lolly at the 'Mansion'  
Areti lost weight  
Babis opened  
I wrote a story about my life  
I took photos  
The light in the bathroom fixed itself  
I got a hip pain  
The geraniums flowered  
The balconies got dirty again

I went to the orthopaedic surgeon  
The presentation at 'bravo' took place  
I gave the questionnaires to the members  
I prepared the presentation for the conference  
We had the first face-to-face seminar at the hospital  
I ordered vitamins and sun-cream online  
I had my first swim in the sea  
I paid in an amount to the school  
Danae completed her internship  
The Heroines group was over!

## New Heroine C from Spain

### Brief biography

I was born in Slovakia, in a humble family. I had a normal childhood, or rather said, a happy one. Then, I had a happy adolescence too. In 2001 I gave birth to my oldest daughter, who is now 19 years old. In 2008 I gave birth to my little daughter, my second one. Four years later, in 2012, I was diagnosed with chronic schizophrenia and I continue with it to this day.

I have learned to live with my illness. I have recently got a job and have also managed to take care of my two daughters. That is why I am a heroine!

## Collaborative poems from Spain

These collaborative poems have been elaborated in the framework of the HEROINES workshop held in Spain during 2020-2021 by a group of around 10 women with severe and prolonged mental illness aged between 37 and 55 years old.

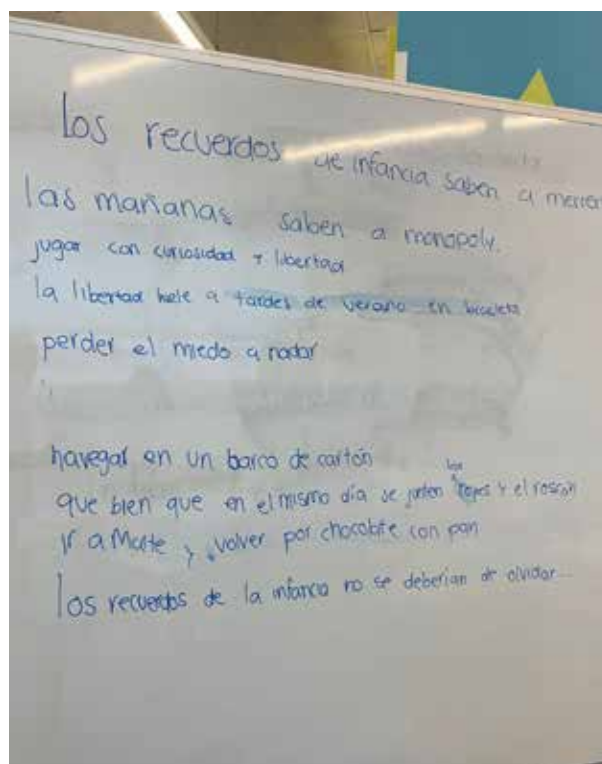
## It is Worth

It is worth writing,  
 It is worth knowing the recipe for a hot stew,  
 It is worth mending a torn sock and meeting new people,  
 It is worth being grateful to your neighbours,  
 A good book is worth reading,  
 It is worth studying, even if you haven't,  
 It is worth finding companions,  
 It is worth dancing and visiting Salamanca,  
 Mandalas are worth painting,  
 It is worth learning to ride a bike,  
 It is worth laughing until your belly hurts  
 It is worth saying I love you when I really feel it...

## Childhood Memories

Childhood memories taste like snacks.  
 Mornings taste like Monopoly,  
 Playing with curiosity and freedom.  
 Freedom smells like summer afternoons on a bicycle.  
 Losing the fear of swimming.  
 Sailing in a cardboard boat.  
 How nice that on the same day the Three Wise Men and the roscón\* come together!  
 Going to Mars and coming back for chocolate and bread.  
 Childhood memories should not be forgotten...

\*Roscón is a typical cake that we eat in Spain  
 on 6th January, the Three Wise Men, the better  
 day in the year for children!



## Riitta from Finland

“We are here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is.”

-Mark Vonnegut



Life's path: Riitta's version of the Treasure Map, one of the Heroines exercises

### Brief biography

I was born in a rural village on a peninsula in the lake Saimaa. My childhood home was a farm with lots of different animals. The distance to the city was about 20 km.

Both the built-up cultural landscape and the natural landscape are important to me; I want to get to know the environment of the area in which I happen to live. I have grown up with this environment. My home premises provided us with food and livelihood, both physically and mentally.

I outline my own story starting with my grandparents, who lived on the farm well before I was

born. My grandparents had come to the village from all over Finland, some also from abroad, because they were escaping wars and revolutions. They were all different from each other, for example, in terms of religious customs. They all left their mark on me.

My values have remained very similar throughout my life. I have a very strong relationship with nature. It has its roots in my childhood home. I want to consider nature as part of my identity and strengthen it.

Literature has also been important to me since I was a child, especially the story of Peukalo-Liisa. I love books and I approach their subjects holistically. My favourite writers include Juha Taskinen, Viktor E. Frankl, Tommy Hellsten, Tommy Tabermann, Kaija Juurikkala. And Yrjö Kokko, whose book *Pessi ja Illusia* contains the most amazing description of spring I have ever read.

All my best friends are somehow related to literature or writing. Many important friendships have begun in the library's reading room and continued via letter writing. They have revolved around literature, writing or nature hobbies.

One book in particular has been very important to me. It went out one autumn and I bought it as a Christmas present to myself. I knew reading it would be a tough experience for me, and so it was. I cried for several nights while reading it, and I read the book - a biographical travel story - several times. I even wrote to the writer and exchanged letters with him. Eventually, I buried the book in the back corner of the shelf, until years later I returned to it. The process that began with the book led to my divorce and a thorough account of my life. I had lost myself somewhere along the way.

All my studies and work have been related to nature in one way or another. For example, I have worked as an agricultural advisor and an agricultural entrepreneur. I have been in contact with nature all my life, both at work and in my spare time. I have worked as a gardener and used many kinds of nature-based methods. In a few weeks, I will graduate as a practical nurse specializing in mental health and addictions, and I hope to be able to use these methods in this job as well. I went through a "Green care" course as part of my studies.

## Heroines Process

When I joined the Heroines group, I had no specific expectations or plans. I came along with an open mind and was interested to see what the group could offer. It turned out to be surprising.

I have found in myself the need to reduce, write in poetic form, and look for diamonds. I feel like everything that is useless and irrelevant has to go; I want to highlight the essential. Group writing has been goal-oriented and the assignments have helped me to boldly write my own thoughts. It has also encouraged me to read my texts aloud. A regular weekly meeting makes it easy to gather yourself and be prepared.

When a friend of mine found out that I was in the Heroines group, he asked if I was involved as an instructor or as a participant. I have myself wondered if I am in the right place being a participant, but I have come to the conclusion that I am.

It has been fascinating to see the reactions of group participants to different tasks, and to follow the activities and effects of the group. The group participants have various backgrounds, but here we all are, whether the person is working, retired or in the grip of an acute crisis. It is great that everyone had the opportunity to get involved, there were no access requirements. We have learned from each other.

For a person living in a remote area who belongs to the target group of the Heroines project, this group can provide the insight that although the environment is not so inspiring for your mind, the most important thing is anyway present: yourself.



## New Heroine D from Slovenia

I didn't have a problem joining a new group because I can quickly build new friendships and be creative. In the group, I felt positive changes that started to affect my life optimally. In my youth destiny hit me hard so to say. I started opening from workshop to workshop and was able to share these experiences with other participants. In this way, my life has faced changes that have started to spontaneously affect my life. Our mentors have given us a topic of conversation every time. I found out I found myself in every subject because I have an original resume so to say. I also wrote poetry for every subject. I got a sense and an instinct to talk, and a chance to give my opinion. I got to know the functioning of the group, which I easily got accustomed to... We talked about different topics, each of which touched my life in its own way.

During the workshop, I was inspired to publish my poetry in a book. Each of us was a heroine, because in the most difficult moments of her life she/we was/were able to do it in our own way. Each of us was a heroine...I like to work on new challenges in life because for me life is an art-song that doesn't end. During the workshop, I was inspired to publish my poetry in a book.

In my personal life in the past no one understood what I felt and talked about. I've been looking for help for a long time, and I've got it in a couple of years. Everyone was very surprised when they realized that I really felt all this about what I was talking about. It wasn't easy. But I justified my words with ease when they started helping me. I can say I've lived in hell on earth. Every day I wondered if I'd ever be able to survive. Not all shortcuts were suitable to showcase my problems... I was completely isolated from the world. I had to retreat into my world and go through the worst moments of my life.

Life is the gift we get when we come to this world, and it is laid in the cradle, what our life will be like. The fates today are deep, original and wide, you never know where you can fall. We are all doing our best to put the goals we have into practice.

It's never too late for a fresh start. I hope that after the corona crisis, we will re-start the life. With the hope of making my recovery as easy as possible, I'm counting on a fresh start and new victories. Let it happen as soon as possible, that's what we all want.

## Mapía M from Greece

Once when...

Once when I felt safe; every Thursday that we would meet, I got a good feeling for psychotherapy among you; I felt that you and the rest of the members were my support.

Once, when I felt disappointed at the start of our journey, it was the moment when a misunderstanding took place, but the feeling was converted into something positive, which brought us closer.

Once, when I realized something new about myself, the group helped me to see this by telling me that I'd changed things about me. It was also that image with the Beetle car and the zig-zagging streets that reminded me that I'd made a start, I'd changed, but I'd definitely got a long way to go ahead of me. For me, it was the day of the absolute realization that I'd still got a lot of work to do. I wasn't disappointed. I have the courage to accept it and to say we're moving on.

Once, when there was a connection, it was the connection with the other members of the group. I felt really nice with the 'gifts' that I was given by the members of the group towards the end of our journey. I felt the connection and the fulfilment. I also felt a connection with the images that you used. The images helped me; through them I can express myself, travel and create. The last image with the Beetle car was the connection point for me.

## New Heroine D from Spain

### Brief biography

What I would like to say about me? I started getting ill when I had my first child: I had postpartum depression. Then, life did not treat me well. The death of my parents had a long-lasting effect on me and then I suffered the psychological abuse from my husband. Everything influenced.

I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Every month I have to give myself an injection and I have my medication under control.

Why am I a heroine? First of all, because I feel free. Secondly, because I am more independent. I have greater will to live. Coming to INTRAS helps me a lot.



## Collaborative Poems from Slovenia

The below gathered information contains writings & poems collected within 2020/2021 implementation of Piloting within HEROINES Project in OZARA d.o.o.

### A Woman

A woman is beautiful...When groomed...  
 With colour on her hair and hair beautifully done...  
 With nice clothing...

She is beautiful...when in laughter...  
 When the kindness is in her heart and she gives so much.

Every woman is beautiful...  
 When she firstly sees the beauty in her...  
 When she loves herself...

### A Moment on the Path

Just today,  
 power and courage,  
 I trust myself, I believe.

On the path of history  
 I stop today,  
 courage and love.

The right path today,  
 of my ancestors,  
 powerful wind.

## Life, Suzana Macun

Each of us needs to be aware,  
of how much life can be beautiful,  
even if not having it all there is to take from society.

We have been diligent children,  
feeling responsible today for this third world of ours,  
that is strained as a complex game of chess.

Of you are a diligent soul,  
also a bit inventive  
you can become  
what we all have dreamt of as children.

Life is not just an illusion,  
it can be a fantastic song,  
singing about spreading your horizons  
and be patient for details...

### ZIVLJENJE

Vsak naj zaveda se,  
da življenje lepo je  
tudi če človek nima vsega  
Bar mu dames družica pomurja,  
bili smo margivi otroci  
dames se pacitimo odgovorni  
za to naš tretji svet,  
ki je kot šah igra napet.  
Če si duša margiva  
pa se malo izmujdijava  
kako postameš to,  
kar kot otroci sanjali smo.  
Življenje ni samo iluzija  
je lahko pesem fantastična  
če le ožornja ~~razširimo~~ razširimo  
in se v detajle pogledimo.  
Ljudje srednji B generacij smo  
priljubljeni za manipulatore izkušnje,  
ki si je privoščiti ne moremo  
ker pač nredstev za to nimamo.  
Jamašnji svet zelo masicem je  
od tehnologije do šume vse preveč  
draži se  
kvisima povsod prisotna je  
boromavimus eo naredil svoje.

Brezdelj milamar me peče  
a kaj bo mikjer vec me dela ne  
kdar pa soce kaj imeti,  
ne delo za tiste ljudi majde  
Magice preveč razvijami smo,  
da baskoli delati moremo  
ta masa domovina sbrvenije  
je preveč socialno paraxdejemu.  
Koromartica nas prizadela je  
magice pa je to priloznost za  
nove podvige  
zato ne smicimo pamti ker se  
in pomagajmo ta svet drugmizi  
ma magé.

Suzana Macun

## Virva Tyrväinen from Finland

“Practice your kindness and insanely beautiful deeds”



*One of Virva´s hobbies is to make angels and send them to people as gifts. Each angel is different and tailored to the receiver.*

### Brief biography

I was born in 1957. I grew up on a farm in the Pieksämäki countryside. I was the youngest of four children. In my childhood and adolescence, I did farming and gardening work with my family. This work and its closeness to nature shaped the landscape of my soul forever.

After my matriculation exam, I studied handicrafts, worked at workshops and as an instructor. I was influenced by a spiritual revival when I became interested in Christian community life. Living in the community of Omenapuukylä (Apple Tree Village) in the early 1980s set me on a path of spirituality and Christian values. Retreats of silence and monastic life became important for me. I have lived in various Christian communities in Finland, Germany and England for 17 years.

When I was young, my hobbies were crafts and dancing. Reading and journaling replaced them at the age of 24. I also became interested in theology and psychology, as they increased my self-knowledge and interpersonal skills. At the same time, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. This has greatly affected my life course, causing much hardship and constant changes of residence. Various therapeutic and drug treatments have been a part of my life for decades. Nowadays, however, I see this illness as a resource, a spring of creativity for writing. I find hope and strength in spirituality, as well as in my siblings' families, friends, and two long-time spiritual healers. Therapy groups and peer support have also been important to me. Exercise as given me joy and helped me to relax.

### **The Heroines Process**

I have experienced sexual abuse in the past. This has broken me a lot, and made me feel I am not worthy of anybody's love.

When I heard that a therapeutic writing group was going to start in my hometown, it felt like destiny had given me a new chance. My dream of writing in a group and participating in poetry therapy became true when I was invited to this Heroines group. In it, I can love by writing. I can verbalize thoughts and feelings that have been silenced. And through my writings, I can send light to those who are lost.

In this group, I have also received support from peers who have had the same experiences. Writing enables you to deal with difficult things, to understand yourself and your behaviour in a new way. Writing gives courage and strength to improve your quality of life by making the necessary changes.

The Heroines group started a process of inner change in me. I felt I was healing from sexual abuse, gaining self knowledge and self esteem. Since the group meetings began, I have been writing my diary. I have begun to write poetry and to feel feelings that had long been suppressed. My dream of hiring a personal trainer has also come true. This led to much doubt about my usual negative thoughts: "Is it really true that I am bad and worthless? What if I'm good as I am, for myself, for others, and for God? What if I am good as an unfinished person, worthy of love and capable of love?"

I am thankful for the healing of my identity. God heals broken hearts without us knowing. In the future, I want to go through my diaries and continue working with them. I will study to become an 'experience expert', a title enabling me to help other people with mental health problems.

## **New Heroine E from Slovenia**

When I was invited into the group, I had mixed feelings. On one hand, I felt honoured to be chosen. On the other hand, I didn't really know what to expect. I know all the participants, but not so well as imagining what life experiences they have had. We have different problems - some



of us have had difficult childhoods, others have had bad experiences with partners, and third problems with children, developmental and health problems. But we all rarely talk about it and we're different: one helps the conversation, the other doesn't.

The group's work was initially quite reserved. We were ready to cooperate, but careful. Mentors had appropriate ways of working together, which slowly relaxed us and drew our attention. The last thing I told was the outline of my life story. Not all the details, but a lot of things.

I was born into a Roma family; my parents were alcoholics... I was a lively little girl, a little more difficult to tame and nurture. I have experienced physical violence, while being fostered... I also experienced domestic violence from the side of my previous partner.

I didn't talk about all the details on these past events in the group. About some of the felt pain, however I did. Working together brought back memories that sometimes still hurt but I know that healing is a long process.

If I had the opportunity to participate in such a group again, I would take even more advantage of it. We now know each other better and this also has a beneficial effect on me in general. And we agreed to have coffee sometime when it's allowed again after the pandemic. Throughout the time spent in group, I realized that many of the participants in the group had survived. And that they got up and kept pushing. That helped me.

## Ελένη A from Greece

### The Journey's Gifts

Every day I follow the same route. All is the same.

That day, a group of people was at the edge of the jungle ready to start a journey.

They invited me. Where does it lead, where does it end, what am I going to encounter, what must I do?

I agreed. I want to see what this journey hides.

We begin.



With the first step, hesitancy kicked in. Will I make it? How do I turn back if I change my mind?  
And this company... All neighbours, all strange, all different. Mind you, I am too...

I carry on.

At the first turn, I fall; they lift me up. I fall again and they lift me again, they smile at me. They show me the right path. We all walk together. We lift anyone who trips. We take away the pain of anyone who is hurting.

And when we reached those heights with the wonderful views, each of us saw and heard what we wished to. The sea, the mountain, the house, the tree, a loved one, a dream, hope.

We carry on.

And just before the end of the journey, the guides give me a sword. To make way, to protect and be protected.

I feel the weight of it. A warrior's sword. I hold it tight.

I trip, I get up. I'm holding an oil lamp. Maybe it was meant to be that I fell, so that I may find it. Is it magic? Yes!

- I want gifts for the whole company, for the guides, for all the creatures of the group to get what they've wished for.
- I want to be an example for others.
- I want the companionship to never cease.

I've given my gifts, but also received one from all!

And then the journey suddenly speeded up. We reached the end.

But I was left with the gifts of this company and the sword.

I'll gift the sword to someone, but not just yet.

The gifts of companionship; favourite lucky charms.

## New Heroine E from Spain

### Brief biography

This heroine was born in Mexico DF in 1976. Since she was 14 years old, she suffered from depression and anxiety. When she was 36 years old, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Despite living very difficult times, her disorder has never prevented her from achieving her goals: she studied and has friends and family relationships.

At the age of 36 years old, she came to Spain with the father of her son: she was five months pregnant. When her son was six months-old, she divorced her husband, being far away from her family. It was a very painful divorce; she was separated from her son because the judge was told that, due to her illness, she could mistreat the child. Finally, everything cleared up and she was able to be with her son again. She currently continues to live with her son and she is in the process of recovery, reinventing herself.

She is a heroine because, despite her bipolar disorder and being away from her family, she is still in Spain with her son, trying to be a better person every day.

## New Heroine F from Spain

### Brief biography

When I was a child, I never liked going to school, but it does not mean that I have not learned how to read and write and to know things about life. When I started being a teenager, I locked myself at home and did not want to go out because it scared me. But, over the years, I have managed to overcome it.

I am a heroine because now I do things that I did not do before: go shopping, do activities outside home, interact with colleagues... Also, when I broke my finger and my mother was at the hospital because of a fall, I came anyway to the day centre. For all these things, I am a Heroine.

### **Our Song: Her-We, Spanish Heroines**

That the fear I have can be broken with ties

Today I am laughing because my eyes have forgotten to be crying

Today I am going to be happy to see what I have achieved in this life

Today I am going to love myself more because if I do not love myself there may be no one close to me

Today I am going to look forward because I already left the psychological abuse behind me  
 I feel like a brave and smiling woman  
 Today I am going to get up, laugh and be happy  
 Today I am going to be the woman I want to be  
 Today I have put on my cat earrings  
 Today I like my body, I don't feel like a dirty rag  
 Today I live what I dream without worrying about anything  
 Today I am a woman who shapes her soul.

The collaborative poem "HER-WE", was inspired by the song "Ella", from the Spanish singer Bebe. It is a song against any kind of gender violence, a song for the women empowerment.

## The Beauty of the End, Spanish Heroines

The beauty of the end is in closing a cycle and opening a new one,

A very bad beginning with illness and the way to recovery.

The beauty of the end is in healing,

In accepting and learning changes

In loving oneself.

The beauty of the end is my freedom's recovery and the rebirth of the person I am

And that with each ending a memory remains.

The beauty of the end is having your own freedom to change direction. The beauty of the end is sadness that leads to beauty.

## Art works inspired by the HEROINES' writings

The following pieces of art emerged from the disinterested collaboration of local artists from Spain, Slovenia, Greece, Finland and United Kingdom. These artists, most of them female artists, were invited to know the New HEROINES collective, even joining some of the writing therapy sessions in some cases, thus feeling directly the power of this technique. Then, these artists knew about their stories of overcome, their fight against gender violence, their claim for equal opportunities, the empowerment process of these women whose voices have been silenced for so long. Art has been used here as way to give the New Heroines collective a new voice that sounds loud and clear, able to reach the whole society.

The poems and writings created by the New Heroines during the Heroines workshops implemented during 2020-2021 inspired the following photos, paintings, collages, illustrations, art installations, jewels, etc. These art works were shown in the public art exhibitions organized by the HEROINES partners between September and October 2021 jointly with the writings that inspired them.

### Art works from Greece



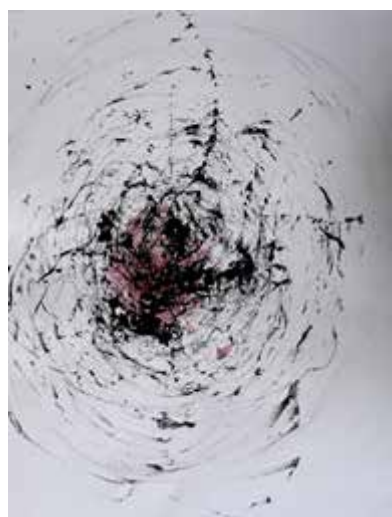
1. A step that waits



2. An obscure road



3. . A slithering snake



4. A whirlpool



5. A flower that is thinking of blossoming

**Title:** Indecisiveness (1-5).

**Name of the artist:** Despoina Papaioannou.

**Materials/Technique used:** acrylic paints, paper napkin, painting paper.

**Artists' words:** Works inspired by the writing "Indecisiveness".

She is an unde...  
A step that waits  
A pause  
A delay  
An obscure road  
A slithering snake  
A whirlpool that pulls you under  
A flower that is thinking of blossoming  
She has roots  
She is still  
She likes to stay... sometimes for years  
She hates change  
She is born of change



**Title:** Life: it calls for us and welcomes us!!!

**Name of the artist:** Vicky Vlahogianni.

**Materials:** Acrylics on canvas 120X110cm.

**Artists' words:** Work inspired by the story "I Welcome Me to the Heroines Group". The small, everyday things that shape our lives; habits which strengthen us, people around us who are ready to fill gaps and insecurities, to offer an apology and affection! Life: it calls for us and welcomes us!!!





**Title:** Deep breath.

**Name of the artist:** Sofia Vlachogianni.

**Materials:** Mixed media on canvas.

**Artists' words:** The work, inspired by the story "Once when...", captures feelings of security, acceptance, optimism and disappointment too, in this journey of pursuit and expression.

**Title:** New Beginning.

**Name of the artist:** Christina Sotiropoulou.

**Artists' words:** A New Start... All the stories touched me. The story "New beginning" touched me the most because the phrase 'new start' has always been a synonym for hope and optimism for me. A synonym for a magical journey that is starting and is inviting you to follow it. There is always a 'new start' for us all, as long as we follow that ray of light that shows us the way, and so... in some other city or town, there will always be a lit window to welcome us; a place that we may call 'our own.' All we must do to find it, is draw the curtain and let it reveal itself before our eyes, thus making a New Start. Dear Heroines, I thank you too for this beautiful journey and for this new start!



**Title:** The lamp.

**Name of the artist:** Diana Nasiopoulou-Papageorgiou.

**Artists' words:** All the stories are extremely important! I choose the one which is 'closest' to me, the one on the magic of the 'journey'. The destination is appealing – for many – but for me, the journey has the most charm. Indicatively, let me quote parts from the "The Journey's Gifts" story which later support my work: The journey's gifts / All are peculiar, all are different. And so am I... / I trip, I get up. I hold a lamp. Maybe it was meant to be that I stumbled over it. Is it magic? Yes! / I don't want this companionship to end. / The gifts of the companionship are my favorite lucky charms! / ... The man I drew is homeless. His life, a continuous uphill and downhill. He is not alone... he has his small dog for company – and a cat in a small plastic house. He always carries them with him, on his bicycle. Uphill, downhill, in rain, in thunderstorms and in the hot sun, the mates are always together! His mates, whom he loves and needs and helps and who love and need and help him equally as they now share their lives. A magic lamp that he stumbled over and found, gifted them to him! And he will never part from them!



**Title:** Thoughts.

**Name of the artist:** Marina Alamanioti.

**Materials:** Ring 1 – Copper, unrefined pyrite. Ring 2 – Bronze, unrefined chalcopyrite.

**Artists' words:** Focusing on thoughts and confusing emotions that trouble us women daily, I designed and constructed the series 'Thoughts' to emphasize the beauty hidden in the female mind. Beautiful paranoia within us which leads to unrefined shine!



**Title:** New Beginning

**Name of the artist:** Fotini Hamidieli

**Artists' words:** The work, inspired by the "New Beginning" story, talks about nest, eggs, life, renaissance. magic lamp that he stumbled over and found, gifted them to him! And he will never part from them!

**Title:** Quest

**Name of the artist:** Dora Passaloglou

**Artists' words:** Work inspired by the "New Beginning" story.



## Art works from Slovenia



**Title:** Voice in the silence.

**Name of the artist:** Ivanka Lehner.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acryl on canvas.

**Artists' words:** When you are alone, you can hear numerous voices.



**Title:** Sunday morning.

**Name of the artist:** Ivanka Lehner.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acryl on canvas.

**Artists' words:** When the sun shines in all of the hidden corners.



**Title:** Caught in time.

**Name of the artist:** Ivanka Lehner.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acryl on canvas.

**Artists' words:** We adjust without panic.





**Title:** Vacation in Izola.  
**Name of the artist:** Ivanka Lehner.  
**Materials/Technique used:** Acryl on canvas.  
**Artists' words:** Carefreeness, easiness for soul and body.



**Title:** Pannonian wheat.  
**Name of the artist:** Ivanka Lehner.  
**Materials/Technique used:** Acryl on canvas.  
**Artists' words:** Homemade bread is the sweetest.



**Title:** UNITY.  
**Name of the artist:** Sandi Horvat.  
**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.  
**Artists' words:** And she became one with the world.



**Title:** DETERMINATION.  
**Name of the artist:** Sandi Horvat.  
**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.  
**Artists' words:** And she decided to take the next step.



**Title:** COMPASSION.  
**Name of the artist:** Sandi Horvat.  
**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.  
**Artists' words:** She realized that compassion is a bond (connection/tie?) that is not on sale.



**Title:** JOY.

**Name of the artist:** Sandi Horvat.

**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.

**Artists' words:** She realized that joy needs no cause.



**Title:** STABILITY

**Name of the artist:** Sandy Horvat.

**Artists' words:** The work, inspired by the "New Beginning" story, talks about nest, eggs, life, renaissance.

**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.

**Artists' words:** She stepped on solid ground and defied the challenges.





**Title:** POWER.

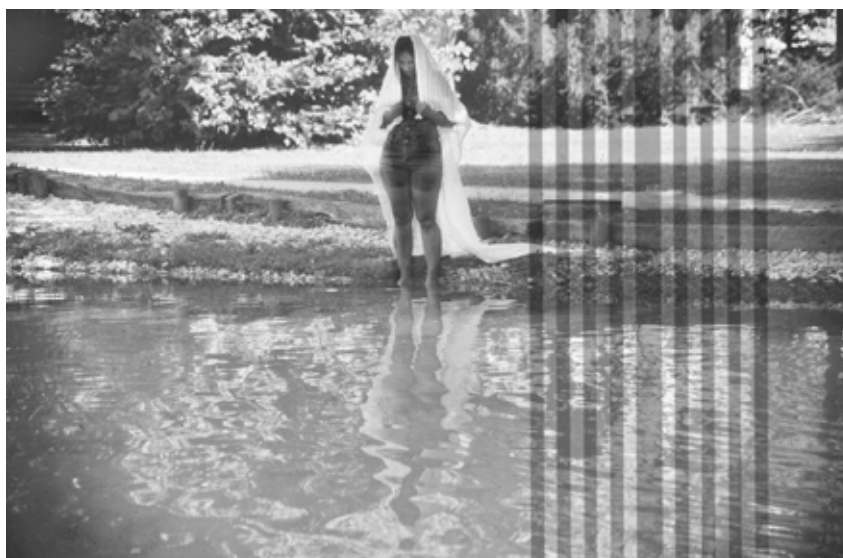
**Name of the artist:** Sandi Horvat.

**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.

**Artists' words:** When she accepted the whole of herself, she discovered mutual power.







**Title:** Ozara's Women – Heroines (Photo series).

**Name of the artist:** Nataša Kos.

**Materials/Technique used:** Photography.

**Artists' words:** Any form of violence and discrimination is unacceptable! The occurrence of violence depends on how society reacts to it. Therefore, violence is a social problem and not an individual problem of the individual experiencing it. In my series, I often tell such stories through photography, and through research into the origins of the series, I have also traced many myths that exist about violence: violence is conflict, alcohol abuse is an excuse for violence, if it were really so severe, he (the violator) would already be left, there are always two sides to the story... Known to all! However, this is not the case...

It is not easy to say that you are experiencing violence "out loud". It wasn't for me either. I completely understood them. It's hard to open up, hard to say what you're experiencing without being told: ah since it's just a conflict! It will be saved, only a little patience is needed. There is also a traditional upbringing here, especially among older women and of course village life: to be patient, to be patient at all costs. What will they say in the village? But the days go by, the years go by, the violence escalates.

With my photographs I try to address the viewer, to present topics that are still taboo in our environment. As well as



violence. It is not talked about out loud, it is not questioned, it is kept silent. The photos are intended to be black and white. Black and white becomes the world and its surroundings if you live in a violent environment. You become less and less sociable, you must not talk about it, you must not show how your life is, your eyes, your gaze is drooping, your personality, your life, your face is disappearing. Maybe Ozara's women will resent me for not having faces in the photos. But you become like that if you live in violence day in and day out. It's not you, it's not your soul, it's not your face.

## Art works from Spain



**Title:** Black Phoenix.

**Name of the artist:** Erika Gabrielle.

**Materials/Technique used:** Gouache and metallic paint on paper.

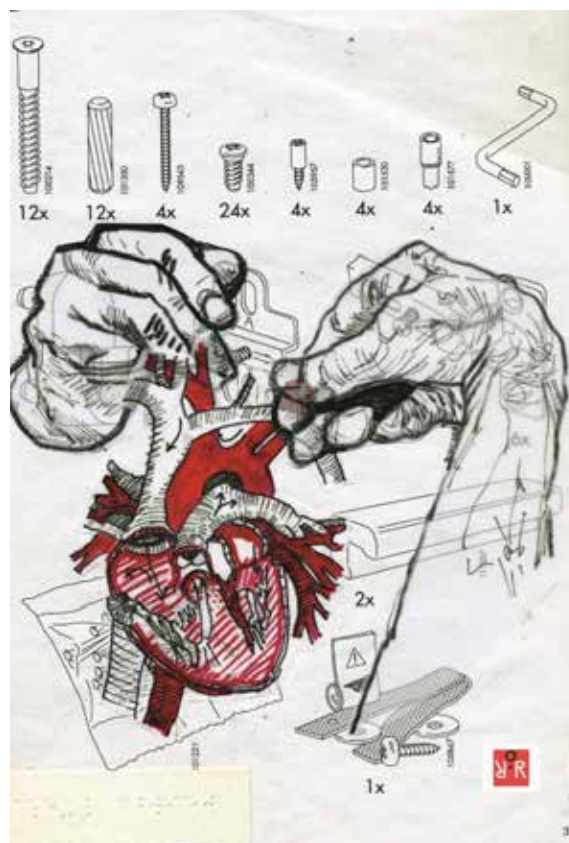
**Artists' words:** This painting is inspired by Ana Isabel, whose wonderful poem motivated this work. As I imagined the poem, I see it as a person who began to fade, but at the same time managed to feel free from it. I think a Phoenix is a great way to represent her, the bird that rises from her ashes. I used black as a base to bring out the colors of the Hungarian floral pattern and metallic paints. The reason I used this floral pattern is because it enhances the feeling of hope in dark times. Have you ever seen a black phoenix with flowers on its body?

**Title:** Kintsugi (The Japanese art of rebuilding things by putting gold in the cracks, ennoblement and making them more valuable).

**Name of the artist:** Cromatophor atm (M<sup>a</sup> Carolina Rosano Martín).

**Materials/Technique used:** Mixed technique from collage of an Ikea manual as background and composition of anatomical drawing in black Sailor Manyo ink and beveled Copic marker No. YR09 red china on vegetable paper as support.

**Artists' words:** This collage image is the product of a necessary poetry workshop and was executed together with other proposals for a text by Eduardo Galeano. As the one used and chosen to present was another, it seemed to me that this work could fit perfectly into the text that the INTRAS Foundation sent me as a proposal for the HEROINES project. This image speaks of rebuilding life, of remaking it, of choosing to be a survivor rather than a victim. Bread and moon can survive after a shipwreck, but only with the determination of a commitment to oneself. Not surprisingly, in every tunnel there is a crack through which light enters, you just have to understand that our pair of hands sometimes works as a containment dam. Accept our edges and thorns: understand them and learn to love them.







**Title:** Metamorphosis.

**Name of the artist:** Bulgarcita (África Bayón Acebes).

**Materials/Technique used:** Collage of reused fabrics, on table painted in gold.

**Artists' words:** The poem has suggested the need to fly over adversity, to leave behind what prevents flying, to move freely. That is why I have drawn-sewn a female character with butterfly wings, on the roses that have been opened. The maturity of thought, one's life seen from within.



**Title:** Dolls' House.

**Name of the artist:** Lunademayo (Estíbaliz Gómez).

**Materials/Technique used:** Mix technique.

**Artists' words:** The words written by Nines brought me the memory of the verses of Gloria Fuertes, verses that I never read and that, in doing so, I thought came from my own handwriting. Nines's written words brought back memories of the past that, without being mine, believed to be mine.

I have revived them because I was the protagonist and I heard the sounds, and the smells I smelled, and I called to them when I closed my eyes I saw them, I could almost touch them, but they were fast and they slipped away from me. They say that children do to their dolls what their environment subjects them to. The Dolls' house is a recreation of the corner in the mind of a girl or pubescent overcome by hatred, abuse, harassment and fear, cornered, without senses and with little strength to enjoy the simple things that life offers during those years. It is a dark place, difficult to access, where there is only room for oneself, in which to dream of everything that has been deprived of us (if dreams have not also been stolen). The Dolls' house is an instant built with pieces of things that accumulated and that, once identified as garbage, it is better to throw them into the container to be incinerated in the waste plant.



**Title:** The suitcase.

**Name of the artist:** M<sup>a</sup> José Pérez Ceinos.

**Materials/Technique used:** Pen and watercolors.

**Artists' words:** I have always thought that traveling without a suitcase was a luxury: getting on trains, going down stairs, not having to check-in on planes, not going down the street making a tank noise. I believe that you have to learn this, just as one learns to try to get rid of sorrows, little by little, to go light as a leaf. I'm on it...

**Title:** Snails – in memory of Jean Arp.

**Name of the artist:** Nieves Correa.

**Materials/Technique used:** Photo collage.

**Artists' words:** From my text, because in a certain way it is also mine, the word "snails", "the taste of snails", which I associate with the figure of my father, with whom I used to pick them up as a child, caught my attention. then laboriously clean them and finally eat them. The snail ritual that was never repeated after he died.

Memories and memories of small inconsequential situations that configure what you are and what you are not. Many years later, the photograph of Jean Arp with a Dada monocle would inspire many of my pieces precisely because his look and his attire brought to mind the image of my father and in a certain way reconciled me with the loss of him.

The piece is a photographic collage based on a photograph of my performance "Tribute to Saint Jean Arp." On it are arranged several images in different sizes of a kind of snail made with the remains of the materials used in the performance and with a photograph of Jean Arp who watches us all from the depths of his spiral.

Here, as in much of my work, memory is a fundamental part of my creative process. Personal memory, which is also social and political memory. The particular memory as a way of writing general history. That is precisely why "my text" and its snails, memory snails and memories of the taste of snails seemed so inspiring.





**Title:** They. We... Reflections.

**Name of the artist:** Sabrina Nidia (Sabrina Santamaría Díaz).

**Materials/Technique used:** Photo collage.

**Artists' words:** In this work, I intend to capture with ambition and enthusiasm the text "I feel" between two planes: black and white, night and day. Above, over the starry night, the flight of a watercolour hummingbird, which displays its freedom through its continuous and peculiar flapping. Under him, the mosaic with the different heroines represented photographically, which, thanks to their brave, transgressive and nonconformist character, have contributed all their potential and innumerable improvements not only to the female gender, but to all humanity.

An enigmatic mirror in the centre of the second canvas acts as a link between the work and reality, which instantly envelops the viewer, making him a participant in his own creation and forcing him to interact with it, thus transmitting a different message. depending on the senses of the person observing it and their desire for introspection.

Using the collage technique, I want to make visible the strength, the struggle and the perseverance of all those women (not only those who appear in the work) who in their day to day pursue their dreams, come out despite the circumstances teaching us new paths to travel. It means a lot to me to participate in this project, both for being a personal challenge and for allowing me to investigate and get closer to more resilient women. Thanks to art we can explore and explore ourselves, we can get to know the world and make ourselves known a little more.



**Title:** Louise & Louise.

**Name of the artist:** Tanitart (Paloma Masnou).

**Materials/Technique used:** Digital photography.

**Artists' words:** The photograph that I present here is inspired by the text "Why it is important to share with other women" and speaks of love and affection, the important value of supporting, helping, listening to each other and creating bonds of sisterhood between us. It talks about breaking down imposed social barriers and looking into each other's eyes with love.





**Title:** With these hands.

**Name of the artist:** Akesi Martínez (Cristina Rodríguez).

**Materials/Technique used:** This is an experimental piece, in Carborundum printmaking technique. It has been made in the frame of International summer workshop at CIEC (Centro Internacional de la Estampa), Betanzos. I want to express my profound gratitude for the printmaker and artist, David Arteagoitia for all his knowledge and advice during the development of this piece. And also, to the Foundation Jesus Núñez (CIEC), without its contribution for the dissemination of printmaking in Spain would not be possible.

**Artists' words:** "With these hands" is a poem written by women, from personal experiences by collective creative process. In fact, from the personal to the collective memory. Women daily day matters, point of views, narratives, and personal experiences make emerge a homely common cosmos portrayed by daily actions, by grandness. Women faces, and hands shape a piece that has movement itself. Different points or views, narratives, and personal stories united by our eyes, symbolized with poetry.

The viewer needs to be present in the action of observing the painting, it makes the experience itself an approaching piece in the art of empathy. Recognize ourselves in other women experiences from our unique personal narrative, makes possible share it and transform our collective role in the society.

Since 2014 I work as a freelance Illustrator. I like to take my work outdoors, interact and explore beyond the paper. Covering a wide range of fields; such as editorial, publishing illustrations, and street art works. My professional grades include Design, and Fine Arts specialized in Illustration (HNC), Master Architect, and Lecoq theatre studies. All of them, and my daily life, influence my work. [www.akesimartinez.com](http://www.akesimartinez.com) /Instagram Akesi\_martinez.



**Title:** Important places.

**Name of the artist:** Raquel Cabrero.

**Materials/Technique used:** Analog collage (combination of ink, paper, dry leaves and thread on paper).

**Artists' words:** The graphic work, like the inspiring text, is a succession of the important places that we collect throughout our lives. Places that are memories, emotions, spaces and encounters. Places that are added as a collage, of diverse origins and natures, that gain meaning only through our trip. Places that mark us, define us and, finally, make us grow as a person.



**Title:** Future.

**Name of the artist:** Rusalka (Inés Sánchez Castro)

**Materials/Technique used:** Oil on cardboard.

**Artists' words:** What most caught my attention about the text was the positivity it conveyed. Despite the sadness and bad experiences, it is important to look forward to tomorrow. And always loving us as we are because, nobody is perfect! This, which is already a cliché, is sometimes very difficult to carry out. That is why this text seems special to me, because it transmits the energy to carry it out. There will be good times and bad times, but once the path to the "new you" is started, it will become easier and easier to follow.

Ties struck me as a very significant element in this message. They move with speed and joy and their circular movements that never end, invite us to continue



**Title:** Colours.

**Name of the artist:** Gloria Rubio Largo.

**Materials/Technique used:** Pop-up book illustrated with digital collage technique.

**Artists' words:** "Colors" is the story about Beatriz's father, a person who protected her from black events and who created "rosy world" just for her. She discovers that everything has something positive to "fly" in life. Her text is the origin of the story told with my images; besides to show the narration, this book tries to tell more things that the viewer-reader must imagine. A very aesthetic and symbolic text in which the reader must make their own reflection on the meaning of color and life events.

An attempt has been made to present text and illustration in a perfect choreography that each time add more meaning to the story. The images also work independently. The technique used is digital collage, part of textures made with traditional graphic techniques, which together with photographs, silhouettes and flat colors give meaning to a story that invites us to live and fly.

## Art works from Finland



**Title:** "Ajattelen sinua (I am thinking of you)."

**Name of the artist:** Hannele Haatainen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic painting.

**Artists' words:** I read the texts multiple times and the feelings and atmospheres were transformed into my paintings. It was interesting to process these, at times pretty heavy, texts. I wanted to take a perspective of hope in my paintings.



**Title:** Lintu.

**Name of the artist:** Hannele Haatainen.

**Materials/Technique used:** oil paint/ acrylic.



**Title:** Fearer of the end.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on paper  
65 x 50 cm, 2021.



**Title:** Naked in the dark.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm, 2021.



**Title:** Don't push me, I'm a fucking lion.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm, 2021.





**Title:** Rakkaus (Love).

**Name of the artist:** Hannele Haatainen. Photo by Terhi Forssen.

**Materials/Technique used:** oil paint/ acrylic.



**Title:** Taivaan valo (The light of the sky).

**Name of the artist:** Hannele Haatainen. Photo by Terhi Forssen.

**Materials/Technique used:** oil paint/ acrylic.





**Title:** Christ in a desert.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on canvas, 40 x 50 cm, 2021.



**Title:** Rehearsals in alchemy I - IV.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Aquarelle, 15 x 30 cm, 2021.



**Title:** Road.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm, 2021.



**Title:** The horizon doesn't always calm me.

**Name of the artist:** Saku Santeri Heinonen.

**Materials/Technique used:** Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm, 2021.

## Art works from United Kingdom



**Title:** Magic Box.

**Name of the artist:** Ausi Sekarismi.

**Materials used:** Acrylic.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'Magic Box' from Finland by Taikalaatikko.

**Artists' words:** I've chosen this Magic Box because it resonates with me. I can feel the feelings in this poem. What I had in mind the first time I saw the poems is different than what I painted. The more I read it, the more I feel lots of energy from it. So, to visualise the energies, I put lots of colours in the painting. Every paragraph I drew in a literal way. If you look at it, while reading the poem, you could see which is which. Every colour and pattern defines each sentence of the poems. And the magic box itself, I define as a person (the poet).

It seems like they feel lots of things, and everything was scrambled in their minds. Until, they let it out. All those things that have been kept hidden are finally free in each word. When you free the mind, it can help you free your soul. The poet helps me open my eyes. I need to also let my mind be free, by painting. It is such a nice experience for me. Helped me get through one of the most horrible years for me. And I will also let my magic box open after I finish drawing this.





**Title:** Team.

**Name of the artist:** Ausi Sekarismi.

**Materials used:** Glued and Sewn thread on acrylic.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'Team' from Greece.

**Artists' words:** Being in this world feeling like I am alone. And then I saw the poem, and it reminds me of my wellbeing art group. It is a TEAM. We are working together no matter who you are, where you're from, and how old are you. We are here together with a common goal in our mind, to help our wellbeing with art. There are times where I feel like I am not good enough, because I don't have any art degree. But they welcome me with open arms, and help me be more confident. Without them I am not who I am today. Therefore, I paint the team

with different colours for each.

Sewn with threads means we're walking on different paths of life with different problems. We're all grabbing a red thread, which in Asian culture means fate, because our fate connects us together. And in the middle you will see the light. Therefore, never give up. Keep looking for the right person to help you in this world. You are not alone.



**Title:** Herald.

**Name of the artist:** Christina Stiff.

**Materials used:** Acrylic paints and paper collage. Inspired by the poem: 'Herald' from Finland by Riitta Luukko.

**Artist's words:** I chose this poem because it is strong in wording, imagery, structure and composition. It tells how brave, helpful, and daring trees are. It personifies trees.

I have recently been to woods to watch and draw and wait for animal life, observe the movement of trees in all weathers and have been excited and amazed at watching branches and leaves move in the wind, sometimes whis-pering sometimes shaking in a warning frenzy. The trees know and make others aware through their roots, leaves, movement of branches which bend with the storm. Unbe-lievable.

Trees can grow in small places and like a small idea can grow in time. They live long, grow towards the light. They teach us about patience and survival, there is a time to rest and a time to grow. They bring hope of renewal each spring and we wait with anticipation for the young leaves to uncurl and produce their fresh tender bounty of shape, colour and smell.

They teach us that connection is important and the cycle of life is precious and continuous. As we learn to live a good life, being in tune with and respecting nature and humans, we can have beauty in our lives.

**Title:** At First.

**Name of the artist:** Christina Stiff.

**Materials used:** Acrylics, pencils, collage, thread.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'Collaborative Poem' from Greece.

**Artist's words:** I was drawn towards this poem as I could recognise myself in my early forties going through similar experiences after several unexpected incidents in my life. I had no idea at first how to deal with them and feeling devastated I

blindly went on a course in Greece having to make my own way there when the furthest I had travelled on my own was to Weston Super Mare! There were people from many different countries, all ages and walks of life. Many challenges to work through, many tears, fears to face in small groups and as a whole group of people. It was a painful, enlightening, rewarding, life changing experience, with strangers

on an island with no way home for two weeks.

So did I learn as much as I thought I did? Thanks to the poet who set me thinking and redressing some of the current stuff in my life. I agree that the only way to go forward is to feel the fear and do it anyway.

We are not infallible; as human beings we make mistakes in some stages of our lives. The success is in recognising them and doing something positive to change the course we travel.



**Title:** A Woman.

**Name of the artist:** Ausi Sekarismi.

**Materials used:** Digital Painting, printed on A3 paper.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'A Woman' from Ozara, collaborative poem.

**Artists' words:** Every woman is beautiful.

In my painting I have drawn a woman sleeping with lots of flowers. The flower itself is called Calla Lilly and comes from the word "calla" in Greek that means "beauty". So one of the meanings for Cala Lilly is a magnificent beauty.

I painted the flower in white, because white can be mixed with any other colours and it's still beautiful. Cala Lilly itself has lots of different colours, but they are still called Cala Lilly. So no matter what colour you are and what personality you have, you are still beautiful. You are still a woman. Love yourself and be proud of yourself.

**Title:** Bird.

**Name of the artist:** Ronny Payne.

**Materials used:** Acrylic paint, Posca pens.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'Bird' from Finland by Jenna Karjalainen.

**Artists' words:** Life is hard for everyone. Life is noisy, stressful and complex.

We all have times we need, to take a breath away from furore, to rest, to continue. Trauma affecting the typical everyday acutely. The crushing wave of all horrors carried, disabling the ability to function, an absolute halt of desperation and despair. Triggers are everywhere. Disappearance to distress, the loss of hope, drowning in a tsunami of fear, of anger, of crippling sadness, the numbness and pain of everything needing to end. And then the start again.

Gathering all strengths trampled together to form some sort of 'me'. Raising a weary beaten head, the volume of everything turned up loud. And trying again. Again and Again. Again and Again. Again and Again. Joining with hope in the frenzy of life anew.







**Title:** Just Today.

**Name of the artist:** Ronny Payne.

**Materials used:** Oil paint on canvas.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'A Moment on the Path' from Oza-ra, collaborative poem.

**Artists' words:** The importance of strength and awe obtained by nature. The fortitude, vitality and power that inspires and connects to the very start of us. It is beauty touching the original loveliness in being that has been trampled with the ugliness of humanity. Pointing to the joy and loveliness, once hidden, that still exists and needs to be seen. Needing to be a part of... Needing to be held and seen and heard and recognized. Reminding us of Love.



**Title:** Magic Box.

**Name of the artist:** Joanna McParland.

**Materials used:** Collagraph and intaglio print, pen, gouache and watercolour pencil on paper.

**Inspired by the poem:** 'Magic Box' from Finland by Mimi.

**Artists' words:** The poem celebrates some of the joyful aspects of nature, and I have chosen a literal interpretation of this, drawing the animals and plants in each line, as if coming out of a magic box/ the earth. The words evoke the promise of early spring, when nature wakes again with the sunlight. These signs of hope and new beginnings start with the winter solstice, and we can watch them grow through winter; they are always here. We just need to look and listen. Keeping close to nature is necessary; it helps us stay grounded, mindful and see 'what is important'.

**Title:** Losing the Fear.

**Name of the artist:** Joanna McParland.

**Materials used:** Oil Paint on Canvas.

**Inspired by the poems:** 'It is Worth' & 'Childhood Memories' from Spain.

**Artists' words:** 'It is worth dancing and visiting Salamanca' from It is worth... and 'losing the fear of swimming' from Childhood Memories are two lines that stood out from the Spanish Poems. I combined these lines to form an image of freedom, not running/diving away from life but to embrace the challenges by diving in. The view from the Parador de Salamanca inspired the background, the presence of our real life cannot be ignored, but we can find our own freedom within it and explore the many opportunities around us.









**HEROINES**

**The new HEROINES collective**



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