

## Postures of Relief

by Giulia Crispiani

In a wide range that includes soft sculptures and large colorful drawings, play-forms, natural dying processes, workshops and writings, in Maike Hemmers' work, desire lands and leans on different surfaces each time, and at times moves forward, currently the wish resides into a possible future collaboration with the choir Stella in Tangier. In any case, whatever the medium, like the stretching of a body, the works always open up a space for us to stretch our position, and think about inclination.

In my mind, each color contains an experience—a sentiment, perhaps a tone of a feeling. It is the body who chooses one, not as a choice but more as a proper necessity—in fact the body has no choice but to dwell into a specific color, or a tonality, a mass of it juxtaposed to another. It's the body that tells. Similarly to what happens with the voice, through color it is possible to encounter resonances between bodies, visualizations or abstractions related to perception. In color—and voice, there's potential for a play that includes conflict, and grief. *If a personal experience is also always collective, when it becomes that, what is it that makes it apparent?* It can be turned into a practice, a tonality, to be accessible and shareable with everybody else. Indeed, a ground to experience play, conflict, and grief. To allow one's body to let go of itself, to let the self be through its own body, either by becoming hyper aware—i.e. in attempting to describe a symptom to someone else, or by forgetting to have one—in becoming mere gaze, thought, touch, or laughter. In its awkwardness, spontaneity is a conquest, a moment of unfiltered being, a distillate of pure curiosity that makes you dizzy by altering your perception of space. In a longing with no expectations, the space that might open up here is indeed an invitation, a hang-out for more than one body to lay down and decide what to bring into the conversation, even without saying a word: a tonality, a tune, a trace.

Even in the play-forms, since the beginning it is agreed upon that the ground to experience play is not a game: there are no rules, no instructions, no roles, quite the opposite. Most importantly, it has nothing to do with entertainment. The play forms are for you to lean back, lie down, cling to, feel a weight that is not your own—that can become heat, or a cover where your pain can slip under. The internal physical perception around the body that is somatics is taken seriously and quite literally on such grounds. Be it a soft sculpture to nestle, or a modular fence to dismantle, you are left to think with your senses. What a relief [*sigh*]. They are prosthetic devices for you both to rely and lie on. Such is the motive of play. One doesn't get to decide what material they bring, beside their own body and whatever it already carries: sadness, anxiety, discomfort, curiosity. That is the factual revolutionary potential of play: to offer a ground to let-be. Then, to encounter there on this very ground somebody other, may be a stranger, who is enduring something similar, to meet in a color, a symptom, a tonality, a tune, a trace left by a limb—that's exactly the way I wanted to sit, me too, likewise, as well—or perhaps to learn something new, to peak into somebody else's pain and feel a proximity never encountered before, to learn from our postures of relief. That is what play is meant for, as malleability.

Gathering too is intrinsic in play. Gathering cues, to gather with others, and self-gather. All of the above is both material and purpose of this practice. Like a singular voice in a choir is just accommodated, it is the ensemble that is attuned to her tone and everyone else's, the inter-connectedness of all voices and the web of everything working and affecting because of each other—that is a magic enchanter, pure beauty,

meant as “most self”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, how can one bring her most self into a concerted experience? The gathering needs, always, a place that should not interfere with one’s state, but rather enhance it, an activation to start the weeping, to let-be, a color to express physical pain, a tonality, a tune, a trace, that could have you experience something you did not expect. *Gathering means offering what you can carry*. This is indeed the space for possibility, a longing with no expectations, where we wish to meet what or who can trigger the play. Meanwhile, with the drawings, intuition can take the form of a mass of color larger than one’s body, again as a dwelling, a landscape, a whole large new experience—a sentiment, or perhaps a tone of a feeling, an insistent trace of a movement, persistence or dedication. The arm insisting on a surface, while color takes over. The magnification of a signal or symptom described in detail, a tonality, a tune, a trace left by a limb that awaits to fall on somebody else’s shoulder.

This text is a reflection on Maike’s work, following conversations held during the summer of 2024.

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1 Beauty meant as freedom, in reference to Nuar Alsadir, *Animal Joy*, Fitzcarraldo, 2022, p.15.