

COLLAB COOKBOOK

STORIES AND RECIPES FOR MEANINGFUL
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & CREATIVE PRACTICE

notes/ideas/sketches

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

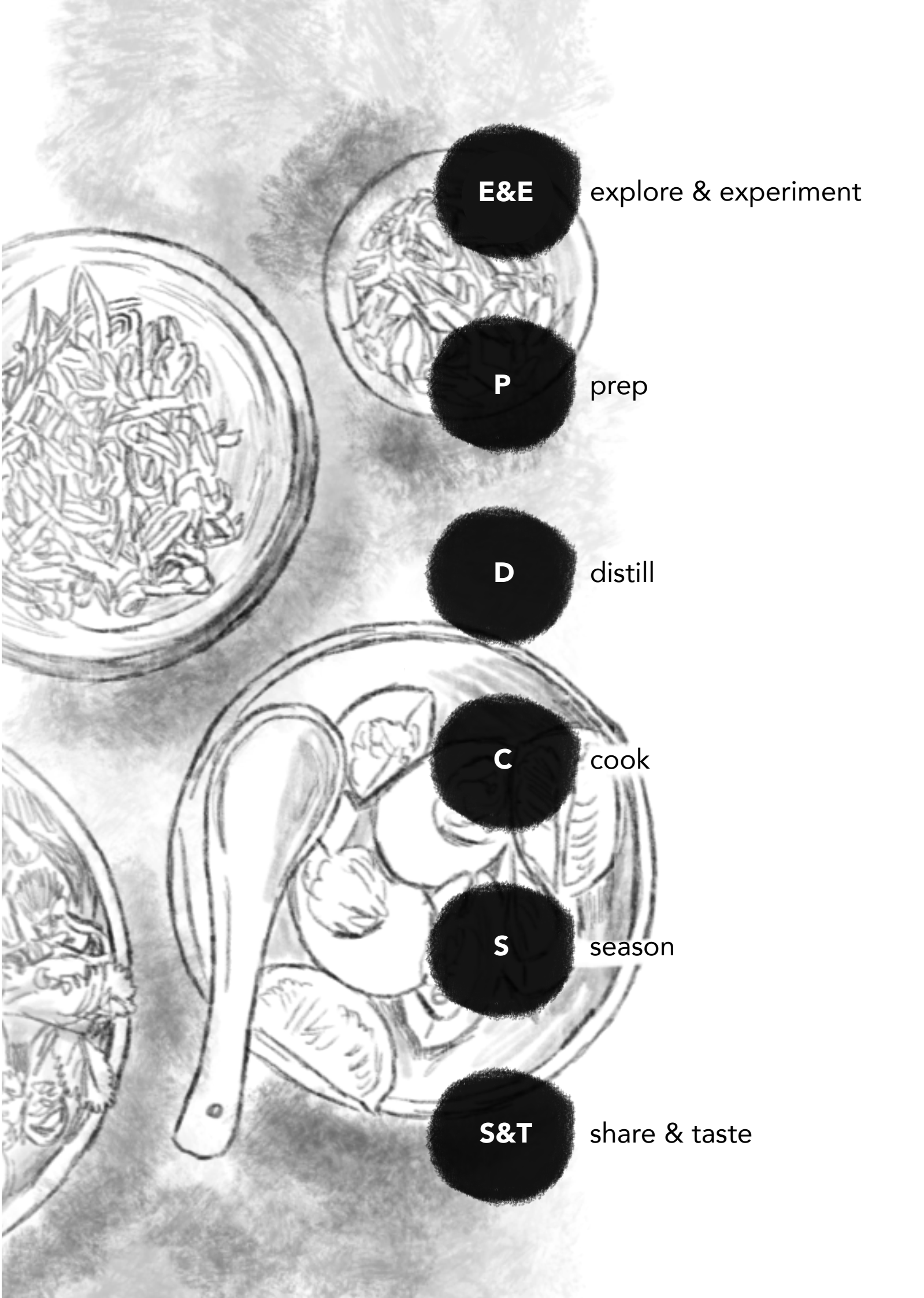
.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



WE ASKED:
WHAT IS
CREATIVE
COLLABORATION?

"TO PUSH THE SAME
GOAL WITH DIFFERENT
BRAINS!"

(workshop participant)

"I THINK CREATIVE
COLLABORATION IS
AN ADDITION OF
 $1+1=3$ "

(workshop participant)

This cookbook is both a reflection and an evaluation of a workshop conducted in Yangon in June 2019, as well as a toolkit that provides a framework for creative collaborative practice across research and the arts.

Why a cookbook?

Food brings people together, it transcends language and culture. In framing this resource within the idea of food, of **exploring and experimenting, preparing, distilling, cooking, seasoning, sharing and tasting** food, we hope that some of its ideas and aims become more accessible, helping to foster a deeper understanding within communities and people; particularly between artists, activists and academics.

The following pages provide a process and a recipe to do this - but they also acknowledge that the resulting outcome will be unique and different everytime, very much like cooking can be. We hope that you will read and adapt these ideas to create a dish of your own.

We imagine this resource to be the first in a collection of **cookbooks** from around the world, the first in a series of workshops and resources exploring ideas of interdisciplinary collaboration and its potential impact in democratic society.

For when we cook together, we create something we could never imagine individually.

Are you an artist, a researcher, a creative practioner, somewhere in between? Do you work in the social sector? Are you involved in advocacy, in policy? Do you work with people? With communities? In government?

Come join us in the kitchen.

"I GOT A CHANCE TO
MEET WITH PEOPLE I HAD
NEVER MET OR KNOWN"

(workshop participant)

So who are the cooks?

This resource was developed as a part of **RIPE - Reducing Inequalities in Public Engagement**, an international partnership between PositiveNegatives, GRNPP (Global Research Network for Parliaments and People) and EMReF (Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation.)

PositiveNegatives is a not for profit that creates comics, animations and other narrative media about social and humanitarian issues with international research partners, NGOs and artists.

GRNPP is an ongoing network of interdisciplinary scholars studying parliaments, politicians and politics.

P4P (Parliaments for People) is a 3 year international, interdisciplinary project which provides grants and support to scholars in Ethiopia and Myanmar for research on the relationship between parliaments and people.

Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) is a non profit research organisation in Myanmar dedicated to the studies of livelihoods, governance, political economy, social relations, politics and rule of law and justice.

The facilitators Sara Wong and Akhila Krishnan, working through PositiveNegatives, are a researcher/artist pair who have collaborated on a number of projects.

Each of these stakeholders brought their own experiences, ideas and approaches to the table. We contributed our own unique flavours to this recipe.

Each of us - including the participants - were cooks in our own way.

So who else was in the kitchen?

19 workshop participants from
9 different organisations and
6 states & regions across Myanmar

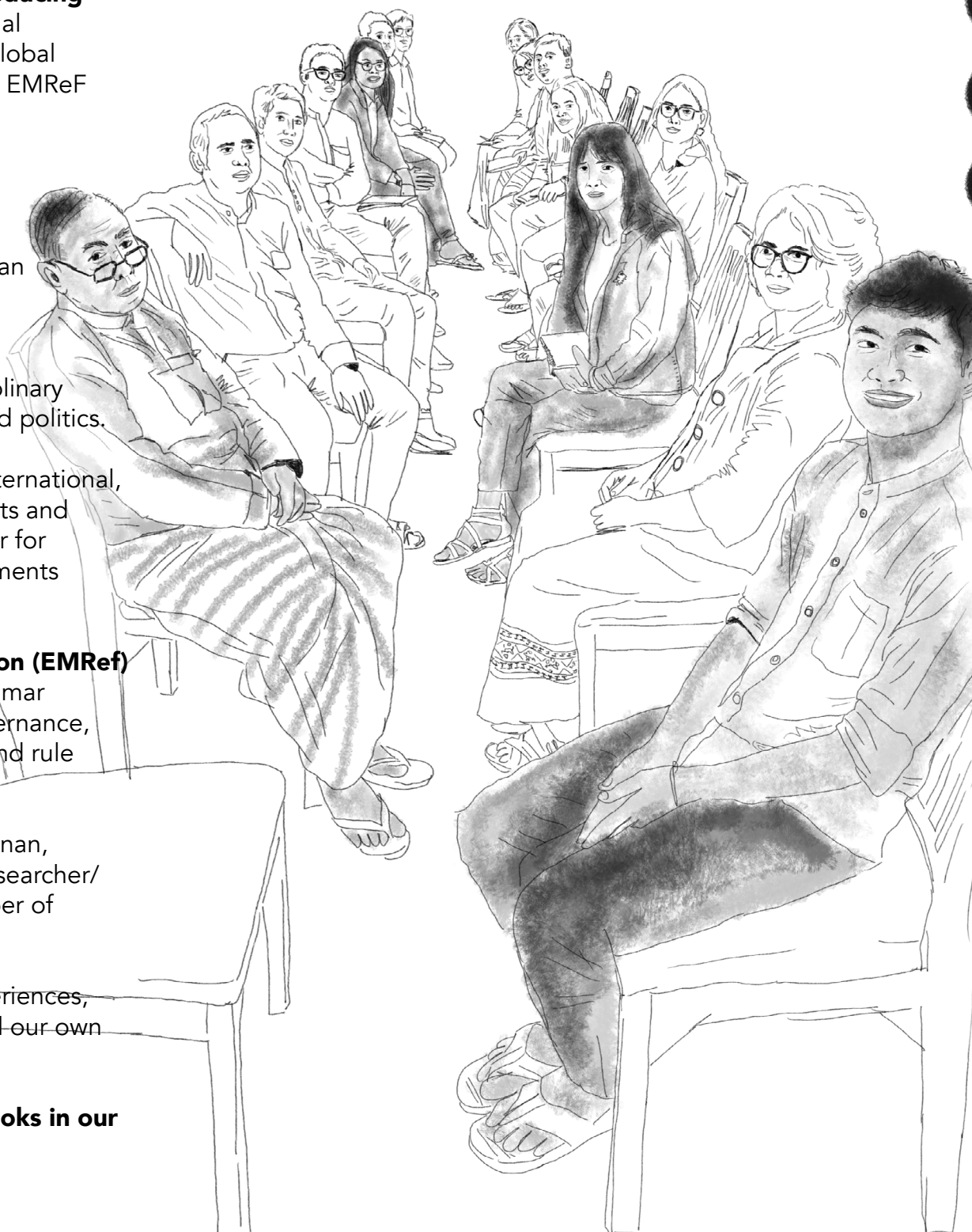
All of the researchers and research organisations in attendance were existing GRNPP grant holders - and were therefore already engaged in pertinent research in their focus areas. This RIPE workshop and programme aimed to build on this work already being done.

The researchers work on a breadth of social and political topics including gender, freedom of expression, political engagement and environmental activism. The artists come from a range of disciplines including illustration, painting, music, comedy and film.

Each of these participants were not only cooks in their own right, but through their lived experience and identities they each brought their own unique ingredients.

"I DID NOT EXPECT THAT I COULD
COLLABORATE WITH SUCH A DIFFERENT
PERSON...BUT DURING THE WORKSHOP
I BELIEVED MYSELF THAT THOUGH PEOPLE
ARE DIFFERENT, THEY MAY HAVE SOME
COMMON POINTS AND THEY CAN
WORK THROUGH IT TOGETHER"

(workshop participant)



P

prep

D

distill

So what are we cooking and why?

Through this project, we hoped to connect the workshop space, process and outcome back to the participants existing work and concerns. **The greater 'why' that drove this experiment was the idea of deepening a more inclusive democracy with our collaborators and participants.**

We also wanted to underscore the fact that lived experience can be a starting point for developing powerful work that communicates with people on a human level.

Inter disciplinary approaches

can be a powerful tool for working with complex issues, stories and environments. Through collaborative practice, you can create something more meaningful and compelling than anything you could create on your own. This provides a unique starting point for cultivating a more inclusive society.

Creativity and the mediums it is expressed in, cut across language and cultural barriers.

In this way, art becomes a universal language that can help communicate important issues. In this way, art and culture holds a high potential for impact - adding richness to public discourse.

Local knowledge and experience

will always be more nuanced than any perspective an outsider can bring. As facilitators we held this idea closely - setting up a kitchen where everyone was equal, one where they

were each able to create their own version of the dish we were preparing.

In the same way as the base of the dish is key to its flavour, the participants of this workshop were also key to its final outcomes.

They were the body of the dish and everything else was built on top.

We structured the workshop development and implementation to be **led by practice**, rather than theory.

Activities were prioritised over lectures and this meant that we all **learnt by doing**.

This, coupled with a **sense of playfulness and a freedom to trust one's instincts** - created a strong foundation for our cooking.

Another key ingredient for the process was created through a **shared commitment** to the space itself.

All the people in the room were fully present during their time there. This allowed us to truly focus and be present in the moment and to **develop meaningful dialogue**.

All of this allowed for a real distillation of ideas, thoughts, shared experiences and commonalities - leading to a new language of collaboration.



E&E

explore & experiment

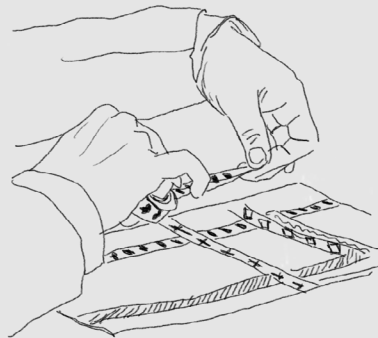
Fun with Washi tape

This activity encourages:

- Unconscious creating to prepare for work to come
- Exploring narrative and sequencing playfully
- Learning to trust your instincts
- Committing to the room, the group and activities



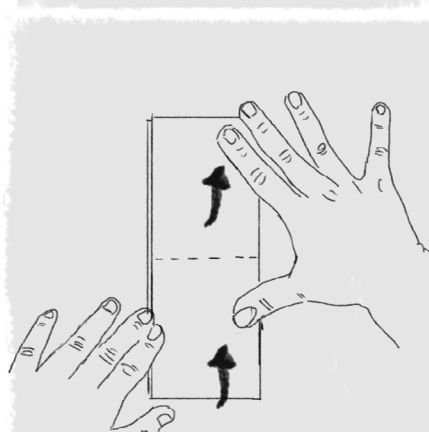
Take a piece of paper



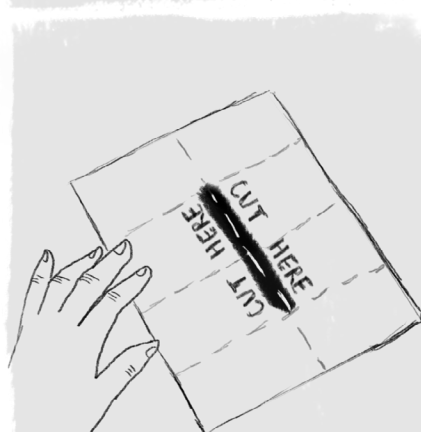
Stick washi tape on it



Fold & crease along the length (in half)



Fold & crease along the width (in quarters)



Open and check the creases are clear to see



Cut along the central line (as indicated)

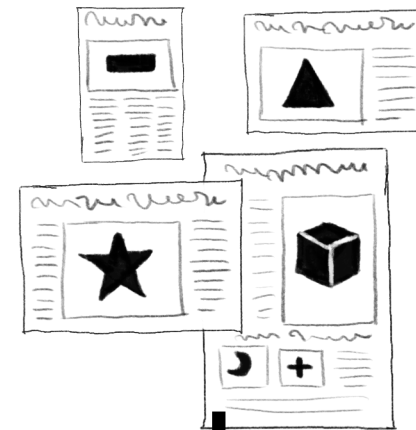


Fold down into a book, your single composition has now become a sequence of images

"I FELT CHALLENGED AS WE HAD TO WORK TO THINK AND CREATE IN A SHORT TIME FRAME!"
(workshop participant)

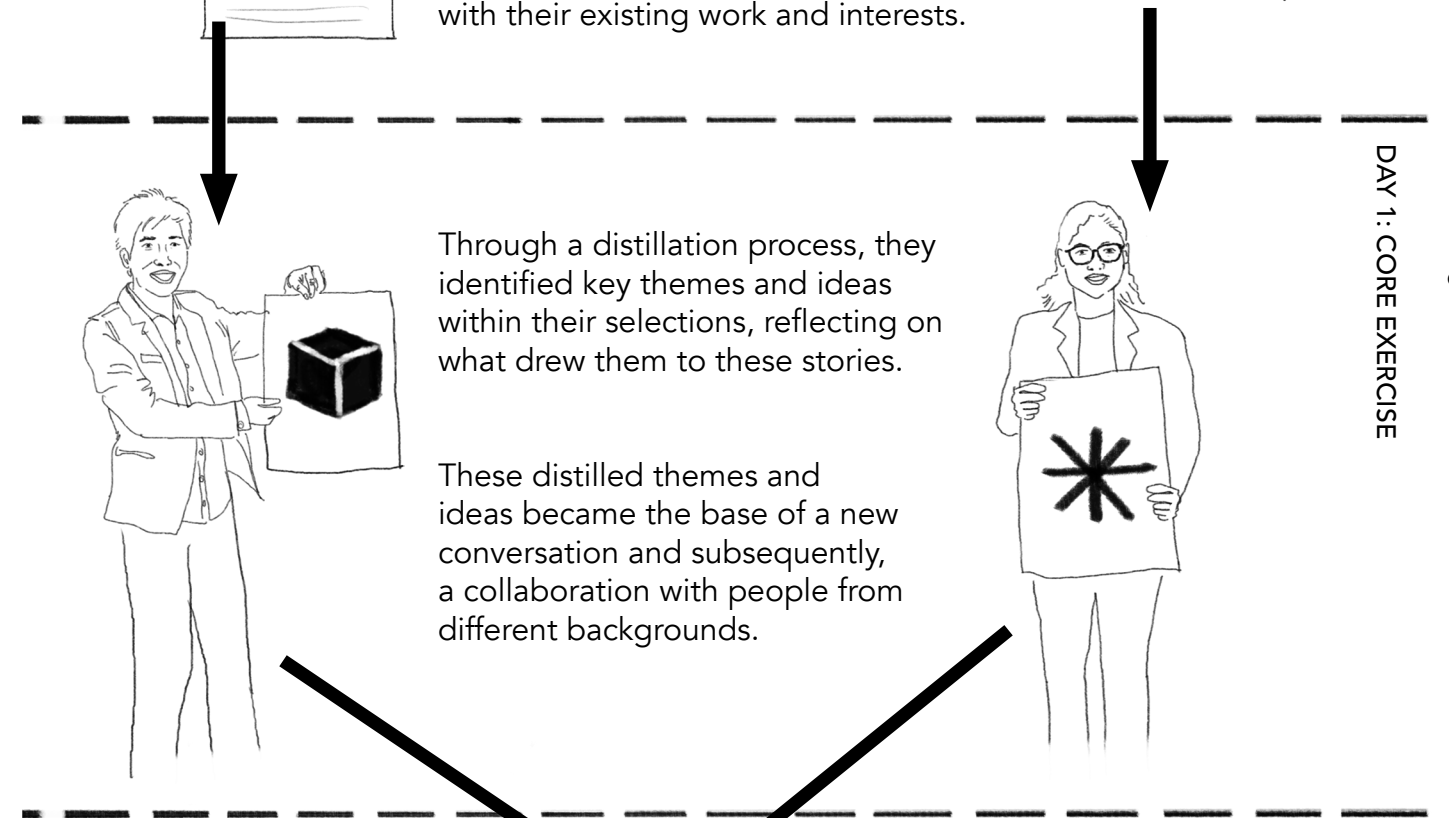
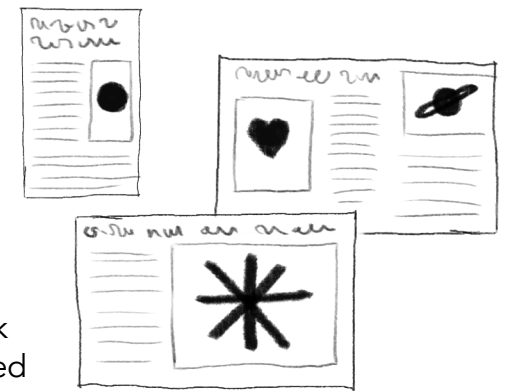
D

distill

**Finding your story**

Once the previous activity was completed, we moved into the core activity of the workshop.

We begin with using real stories, sourced from newspapers. Each participant was encouraged to pick an initial story/article that connected with their existing work and interests.

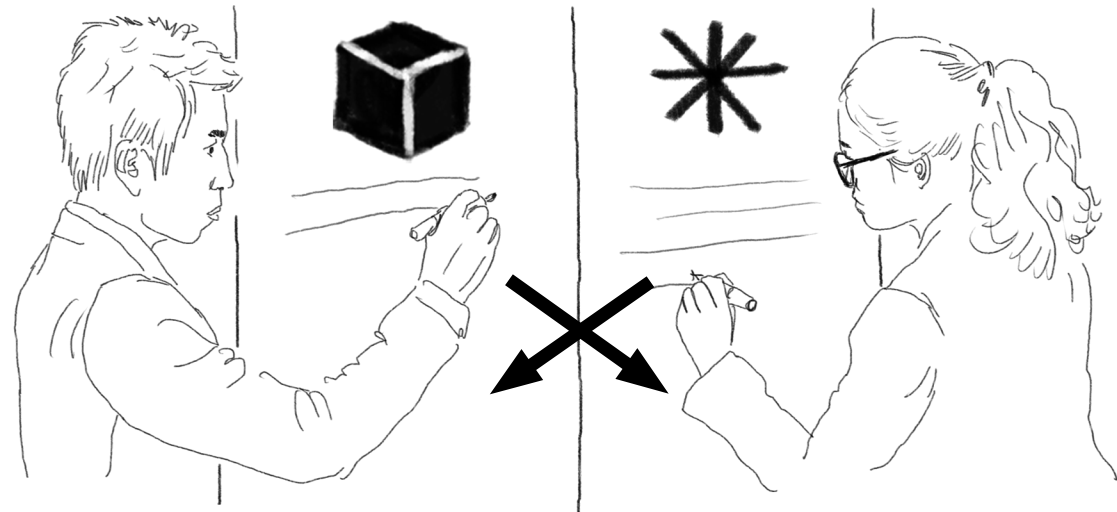
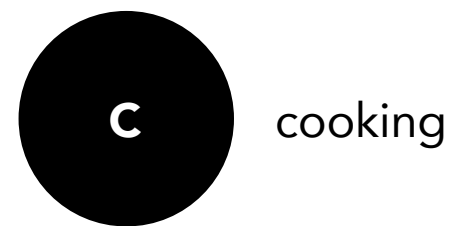


Through a distillation process, they identified key themes and ideas within their selections, reflecting on what drew them to these stories.

These distilled themes and ideas became the base of a new conversation and subsequently, a collaboration with people from different backgrounds.



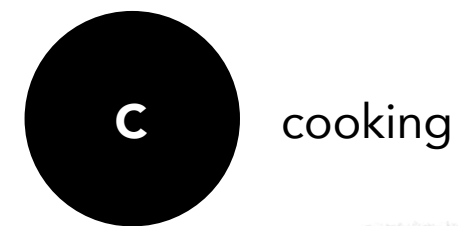
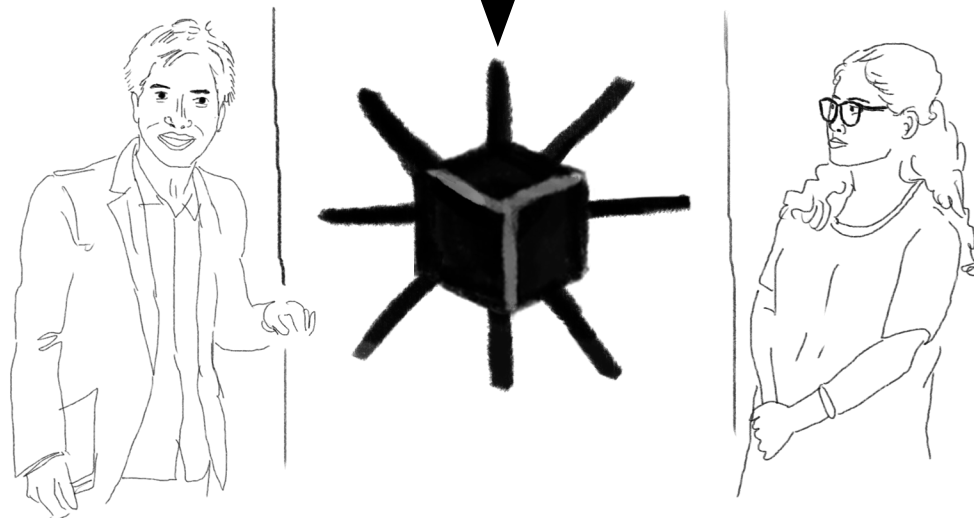
"TO CREATE A STORY BY LOOKING AT A PHOTO IS DIFFICULT. IT IS ALSO CHALLENGING TO CHANGE TO A STORY FROM AN ARTICLE!"
(workshop participant)



Co-Authoring a new story

Participants came together in pairs and trios, to find commonalities between each of their selected stories.

They used these to create a shared list of themes and interests. This was then used to create the basis for a new shared collaborative work that they created between them.



Realising the story

After conceiving the base of a new story, participants were encouraged to begin the process of realising them in practice; through storyboarding and sequencing. We discussed questions of voice, narrative structure, tone and form here - looking at them as strategies.



We also framed core questions for participants to keep in mind as they refined their ideas:

- 1) What is the story and what are its themes?
- 2) Why are you interested in this story?
- 3) What is the greater impact of this story?



"I UNDERSTOOD THAT A COMMON IDEA, FORMAT & APPROACH WAS CREATED BY COLLABORATING WITH A PERSON OF DIFFERENT DISCIPLINE, UNDERSTANDING AND OPINION. TO OBTAIN A COMMON IDEA, WE HAD TO MAINLY LISTEN, DISCUSS & COORDINATE."

(workshop participant)

S

season

S&T

share & taste

Presenting, Observing & Performing:

An important part of the workshop design was to have time for sharing and reflection in the group, so that they could see and respond to each other's work. In these sessions, the group came together even more closely and were able to understand the value of bringing *this* group of artists, researchers and activists together in a shared space.

Through sharing and presenting their story ideas, each participant was able to not only begin to understand if their work was truly communicating to an audience, but in the immediate feedback they were also able to gain confidence in their own abilities as well.

Several created work outside their disciplines and comfort zones:

- **A researcher and writer duo**, created a spoken word poem embodying the Irrawaddy river, whose existence has been threatened by the construction of a dam. The poem was written in the voice of the river, moving backwards and forwards in time with it over hundreds of years.

- **A musician-activist duo** developed a play inspired by a photograph of a young mother mourning the death of her son - that was taken by a citizen journalist. Their proposed project integrated the use traditional Burmese music in a new and contemporary way, connecting local culture with modern concerns.

Several other collaborations suggested projects in moving image, public art installations, comic books and more. It was exciting to see this feast of collaboration and creativity, driven and inspired by an engagement with the theme of inclusive democracy.

DAY 2: SHARING WITH THE GROUP

"I FELT INSPIRED WHEN I SAW OTHER'S CREATION. THEN GOT THE IDEAS FOR MYSELF."

(workshop participant)

S&T

share & taste

In addition to the participants giving feedback to each other, we also asked them and ourselves, to reflect on our experiences in the kitchen as a whole - looking ahead to how we could adapt our approach.

Here are suggestions for how we might improve our cooking in the future.

INCREASED DURATION / FOOD & CONVERSATION

"TO BE BETTER FOR NEXT WORKSHOP, IT SHOULD BE A 3 DAY WORKSHOP- INCLUDING DINNER EVERY NIGHT!"

(workshop participant)

SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

"I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST FOR INSTRUCTION PAST THE WORKSHOP"

(workshop participant)

WIDER AUDIENCES / INCREASED PARTICIPATION

"THE WORKSHOP WAS VERY GOOD BUT IT SHOULD AIM FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE RATHER THAN GRNPP ONLY"

(workshop participant)

"A MORE HONED FOCUS ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF CREATIVE-RESEARCHER COLLABORATION COULD BE USEFUL TO STRESS IN FUTURE ITERATIONS."

(facilitator)

"IT COULD ALSO BE PRODUCTIVE TO PROVIDE MORE PRACTICAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO FACILITATE COLLABORATION!"

(facilitator)

WHAT WE COULD COOK NEXT TIME

RECIPE 1: Public Art Campaign**Ingredients**

- 1 visual artist, primarily working in illustration and design
- 1 organisation, from Mon State, primarily working in human rights documentation, child rights and civic education of women.

Method

- They had previously collaborated on other projects and reconnected during the workshop.
- They applied for a follow up grant with RIPE and were awarded a bursary to develop a new project building on their previous collaboration.
- They worked collaboratively over a period of 3 months to develop a billboard campaign and additional printed assets addressing the issue of women's participation in politics and public life.
- The billboard campaign was rolled out in Mon and Karen State.

Notes & Learnings

- This grant allowed the grantees to be able to conceive and present their work at a new scale.
- It enabled them to strengthen and build on their existing work and advocacy; taking it into a new public space.
- The workshop also helped them to build new networks and a new community of practice.

RECIPE 2: White Rose Campaign**Ingredients**

- Researchers, artists, and animators, most of whom belong to different ethnicities but who share a Buddhist background and religion.

Method

- The collaboration group first met at the June workshop in Yangon where, as part of the 'Finding your story' element to the workshop, both artists chose stories relating to the recent violence against the country's Muslim minority in May 2019, particularly in the South Dagon Township in Yangon - and the White Rose campaign that developed in response to this conflict.
- Together they created an animated film on the white rose campaign, highlighting the unity, diversity and inclusiveness that underpinned this responsive movement.
- The animation was rolled out online and on social media in order to spread the message of inclusivity and shared humanity.

Notes & Learnings

- This creative collaboration was an organic project that sought to respond to an unanticipated event, and to bring together diverse people in their shared values who want to advocate for more inclusive democracy.
- All of the collaborators in this project were Buddhist and therefore belonged to the religious majority, yet they chose to create a piece in solidarity with a persecuted minority who has suffered long term institutionalised discrimination.
- The artists involved both cite specific reasons for focusing on this particular topic; 'to enhance diversity in unity' and 'to promote' freedom of religion'. Though they differ in articulation, they converge around broader themes; the importance of empathy and the richness that comes with diversity. Meaningful collaboration can take place when the larger themes that drive our work are identified and actively engaged with.



share & taste

In conclusion, here are our key learnings as the developers and facilitators of this project.

Local partners are vital

When working in an unfamiliar language and sociopolitical context it is vital to work with a partner organisation that understands the local context. This group of participants was carefully curated by our local partners who were able to bring a deep knowledge of their work, enabling shared interests and complimentary skills to be surfaced in a short space of time.

Committing to the room and the working space is important

In reiterating that participants put away their phones and be fully present in the space, we helped facilitate meaningful collaboration and community building. Physicality is an important consideration both within the space and in the planning of the activities themselves. Academic and creative workshops tend to be fairly mind-based. Embodied exercises, changed the energy in the group and engaged the participants.

Flattened hierarchies are imperative

Equal structures were established between everyone present, including the facilitators and the participants. This was very important to hold from concept through to delivery. We acknowledged that the partnerships in the space (between those present; facilitators, participants, and local partners) were equal, and this was vital to the success of the workshop.

Collaboration and creativity have a universal language

These types of workshops can be facilitated across language barriers, but we need to trust the participants and local partners knowledge, experience and passion in order to do so. Creativity, and the mediums it is expressed in, cut across language and cultural barriers. The local can be global.

A shared conversation as a process has valuable outcomes

When you create the conditions for open self-sustained discussion, language barriers don't impede comprehension and collaboration. A collective conversation pulls the group together in the commonality that drives their work and builds a community of practice. Group discussions and reflections help participants to explore new mediums in a safe environment.

A human centred-design approach yield dividends

This workshop was devised from the ground up through a process of iterating and building; we continually questioned ourselves through every stage and always kept the participants' experience at the heart of our decision-making and development.

notes/ideas/sketches

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

MYANMAR
June 2019

in collaboration with



<https://www.emref.org>



<https://parliaments4people.com>



<https://positivenegatives.org>

funded by



written & designed by Sara Wong & Akhila Krishnan