

# 2024 THIRD Annual Forum Report: Bitá Bell's Reading Session

By Amelia Groom

*I hope Palestine will be FREE*  
*I hope to see beyond what I've already seen*  
*Reparative justice*  
*There will be reparations for the soul*  
*I know that these fascist and oppressive forces cannot suppress all the life they try to suppress*  
*I dream of a generous time for genuine listening*  
*I want a creative and collaborative life*  
*I dream of endless sun and water*  
*I wish for deep breathing*  
*My body wants to be felt and loved and sensed and desired NOT commented on NOT shamed NOT owned*  
*I hope Palestine will be free, from the river to the sea*  
*I wish for safety*  
*I want love to be a radical soft act*  
*I WANT VULNERABILITY TO BE SEEN AS STRENGTH*  
*I hope to defund the police and invest that money in education and arts*  
*I dream of her*

This is a small selection of some of the hopes and dreams that were written – in different colours and shapes and languages and sizes, on long rolls of paper – by participants in Bitá Bell's movement workshop *a dance manifesto of hope and fury*. The workshop was an experiment in “engaging our bodies as both personal and collective archives containing multitudes” and “activating our senses for solidarity.”

The paper rolls with these anonymous inscriptions were installed at DAS Graduate School for the THIRD Annual Forum 2024, and visitors were invited to add their own hopes and dreams to the open-ended archive.

What is the function of hope in our catastrophic present? In a text that accompanied the installation, Bitá offered the following explanation: “Hope doesn't mean denying our realities. It is not the belief that everything was, is, or will be fine. The evidence is all around us of tremendous suffering and tremendous destruction. Hope means facing and addressing these realities while remembering the shifts in our consciousness and what has already been possible. It locates itself on the premise that we don't know what will happen, and in that spaciousness of uncertainty, there is room to act. [...] This collective manifesto is an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings, and it acknowledges that anger, grief, and hope can all coexist.”

The installation also featured a presentation of *containing multitudes, at times fragmented*, a zine by Bitá which was activated on the day of the THIRD Annual Forum through a collective reading. The zine gathers disparate but interconnected fragments – from poetry to manifestoes to excerpts of theoretical writings on performance and protest, to a recipe for the Iranian dessert Sholezard, a sweet, creamy rice pudding made with saffron, sugar, and rose water.

The printing of *containing multitudes, at times fragmented* coincided with the second anniversary of the police murder of the Kurdish woman Mahsa Jina Amini, which sparked the Jin, Jiyan, Azadi - Woman, Life, Freedom revolution in Tehran. As Bitá writes in the epilogue, “My artistic research is intimately tied to my identity as an Iranian queer woman living outside of Iran, in the diaspora. With the ongoing revolution in Iran, ignited by the chant Jin, Jiyan, Azadi - Woman, Life, Freedom, my work seeks to explore the intersections of online and awayfromkeyboard (AFK)\* activism and artistic practices that center around movement and embodied writing.”

Bitá clarifies that while printed matter might confer a sense of finality, *containing multitudes, at times fragmented* is “more like a pause; an intervention in an ongoing process that keeps evolving, shifting, and transforming. This is a loose leaf from a diary, a chapter from a larger collection, a captured moment like a photograph still from a lengthy movie. And it will change, as all things do, in the hindsight that the future holds.”

The zine’s dedication reads: “thanks to all who radically dream beyond, push, and burn the walls of oppression to expose a new reality; you keep the fire burning.” One of the text fragments gathered in the zine is an address to Belvedere 21, a museum in Vienna where an installation by Joanna Zabielska, Zosia Hotubowska, and Alma Bektas in collaboration with Improper Walls was recently presented. The artists accompanied the installation with a dedication on the wall: “Dedicated to Firas from Palestine and Ali from Lebanon, and all the people suffering from forced displacement whose names we do not know and whose stories have gone untold.” However, Belvedere21 removed the dedication, without the artists’ permission. The text in *containing multitudes, at times fragmented* reads:

*Dear Belvedere21,  
Can you please tell us how you removed the line  
“Firas from Palestine and Ali from Lebanon”?  
Did you use your bare hands?  
Did you scratch it off with your nails?  
Did you use any tools?  
What tools did you use?  
Were they sharp?  
Could they cut?  
And then, once the line was off the wall, did you tear it into pieces?  
Did you crumble it?  
Did you throw it in the trash?*

*Where is it now?*

*Where is "Firas from Palestine and Ali from Lebanon" now?*

*What did you do to*

*"Firas from Palestine and Ali from Lebanon"?*

## **Bibliography**

Be Oakley, *GenderFail*

Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*

Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*

Aruna D'Souza, *Imperfect Solidarities*