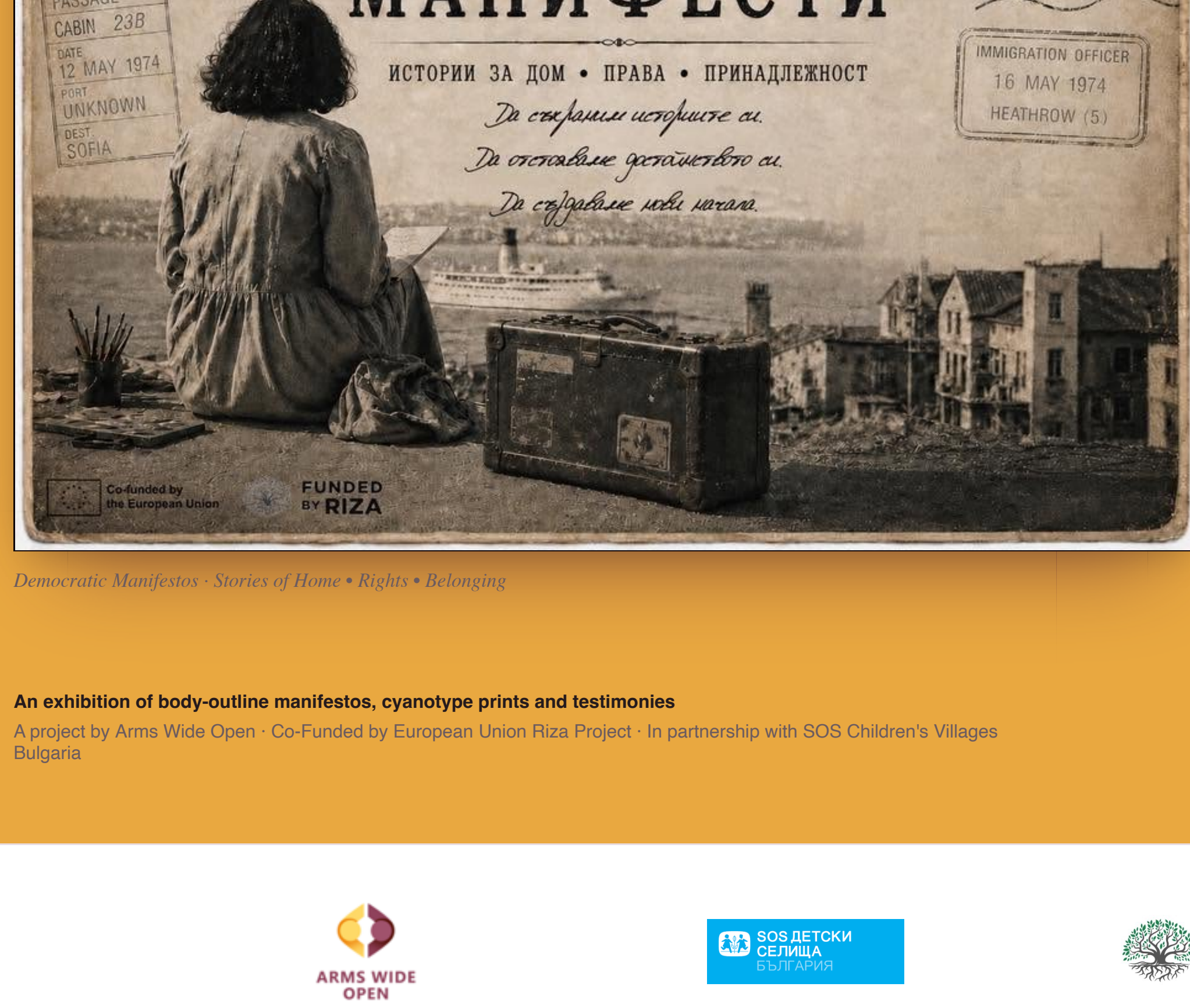


Democratic Manifestos

Bodies as maps, silhouettes as testimony — a collective portrait of what we carry, what we leave, and what we call home.

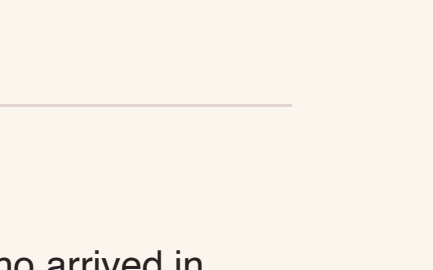
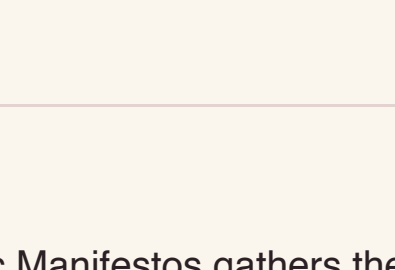
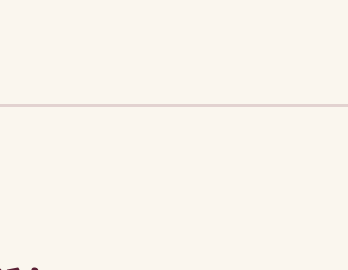
CATALOGUE - VOL. I



Democratic Manifestos. Source of Home • Rights • Belonging

An exhibition of body-outline manifestos, cyanotype prints and testimonies

A project by Arms Wide Open - Co-Funded by European Union RIZA Project - In partnership with SOS Children's Villages Bulgaria



Съфинансирано от Европейския съюз — проект RIZA. Co-funded by the European Union — RIZA Project

§ 01 — Foreword

On *bodies* that speak

A manifesto is usually printed. Here, it is drawn — around the silhouette of a woman who has crossed a border, on a sheet of paper large enough to hold a life.

"Home is where my family is and where my children are happy. Today, that is Bulgaria."

Democratic Manifestos gathers the voices of women who arrived in Bulgaria carrying only what they could hold — passports sometimes, whistles for the night, keys for a door they may never open again. Each participant lay down on a long sheet of paper while another traced the outline of her body. Inside that silhouette she drew the objects, places and people that make her who she is; outside it, the sun, the moon, the country she left, the country she now calls home.

The result is not a portrait. It is a public declaration — a democratic manifesto — of the right to belong, to grieve, to begin again. Beside each drawing hangs a long ribbon of text: the testimony, in the participants' own words, of the day she left, the border she crossed, and the morning she first heard the birds in Sofia.

The catalogue documents this process and its public presentation at RCCA Toplocentrala in Sofia, where the works entered a shared cultural space and the participants appeared not simply as beneficiaries of a project, but as authors, rights-holders and active contributors to society.

Alongside the body manifestos, cyanotype prints created during the programme extend this language into another medium. Suspended among the trees, their deep-blue forms become traces of memory and presence — fragile, individual and yet unmistakably visible.

§ 02 — The Manifestos

Forty *silhouettes*, forty lives

Life-size body-outline drawings on paper. Blue ink for what is carried inside; red ink for what surrounds — memory, loss, hope, the outside world.

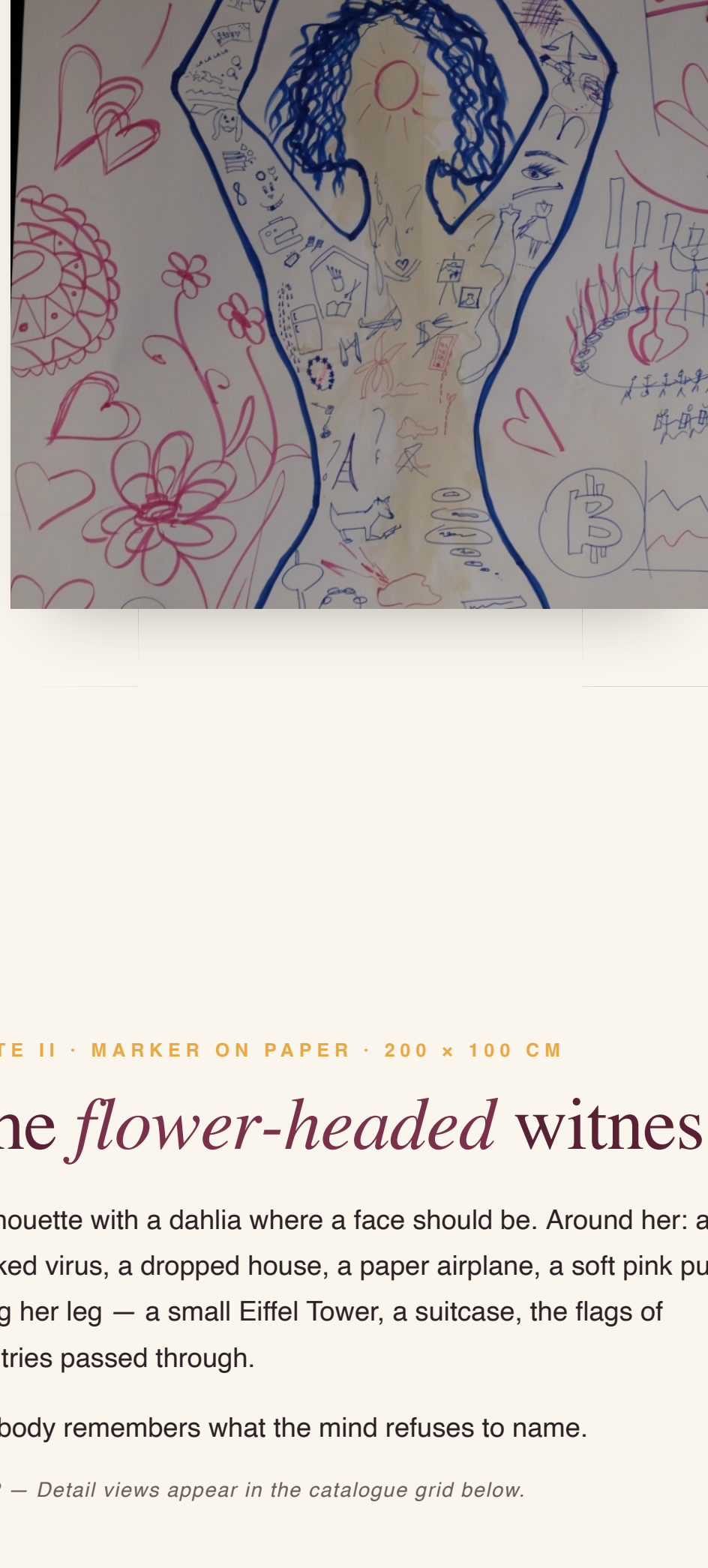


PLATE I - MARKER ON PAPER - 200 x 100 CM

A body that *reaches upward*

Hands lifted like a cathedral roof; inside the ribcage, the domestic world — a house, a dog, small figures dancing "la la la". On the outside: a sun in spiral, hearts, a banner reading orange, a burning building, a chart that keeps falling.

The interior is quiet and populated. The exterior is loud and on fire.

Fig. 1 — Composite drawing by the participant, translated live during the workshop.

PLATE II - MARKER ON PAPER - 200 x 100 CM

The *flower-headed* witness

A silhouette with a dahlia where a face should be. Around her: a masked virus, a dropped house, a paper airplane, a soft pink puppy. Along her leg — a small Eiffel Tower, a suitcase, the flags of countries passed through.

The body remembers what the mind refuses to name.

Fig. 2 — Detail views appear in the catalogue grid below.



PLATE III - MARKER ON PAPER - 200 x 100 CM

Sunrise *behind the shoulder*

A family of four is tattooed onto the chest. On one side of the figure, the outline of Ukraine; on the other, the outline of Bulgaria. Below: an open book, a candle, a baby swaddled tight, two small turtles walking side by side.

Everything a woman becomes when she has to become everything at once.

Fig. 3 — "I brought with me the most valuable thing — myself and my daughters."

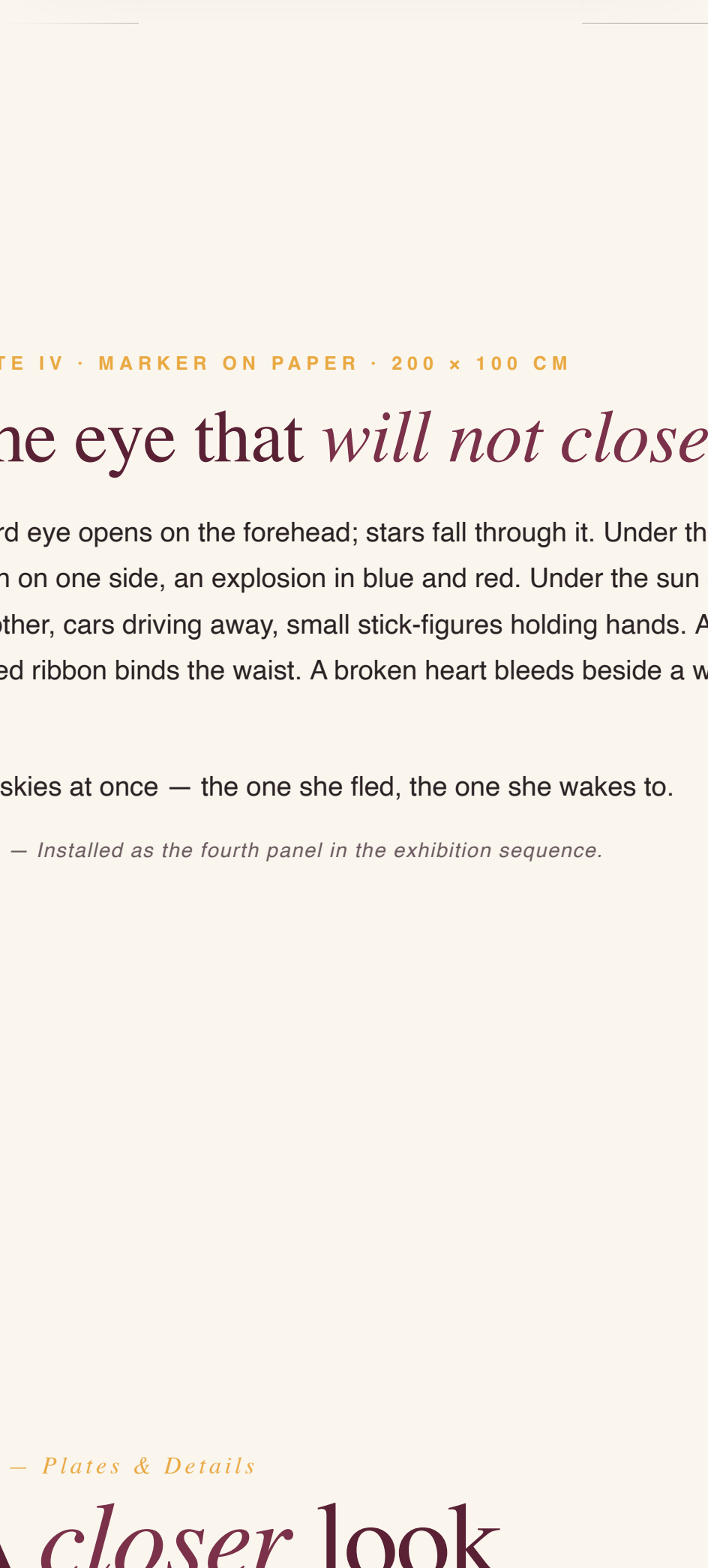


PLATE IV - MARKER ON PAPER - 200 x 100 CM

The eye that *will not close*

A third eye opens on the forehead; stars fall through it. Under the moon on one side, an explosion in blue and red. Under the sun on the other, cars driving away, small stick-figures holding hands. A striped ribbon binds the waist. A broken heart bleeds beside a whole one.

Two skies at once — the one she fled, the one she wakes to.

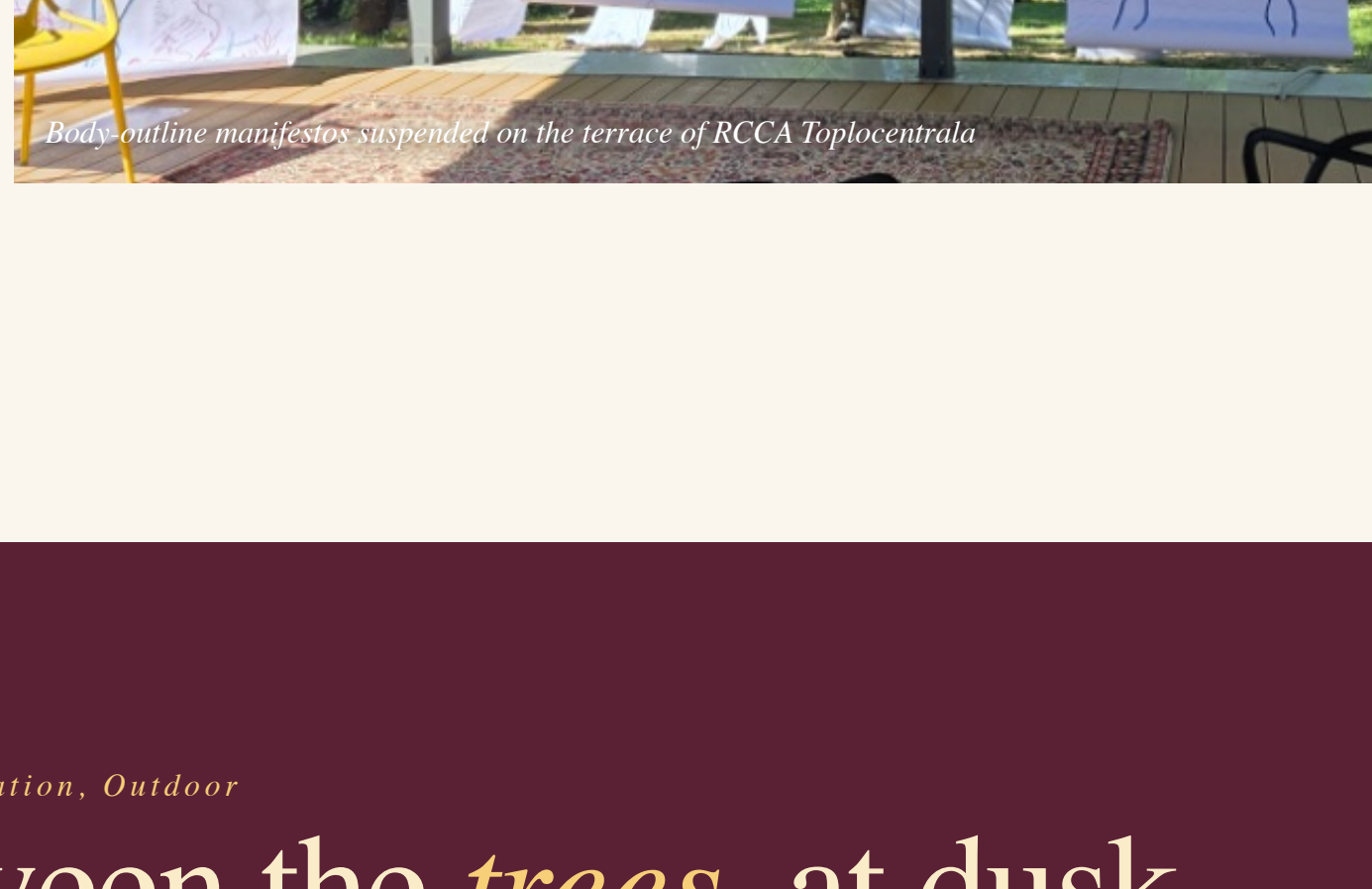
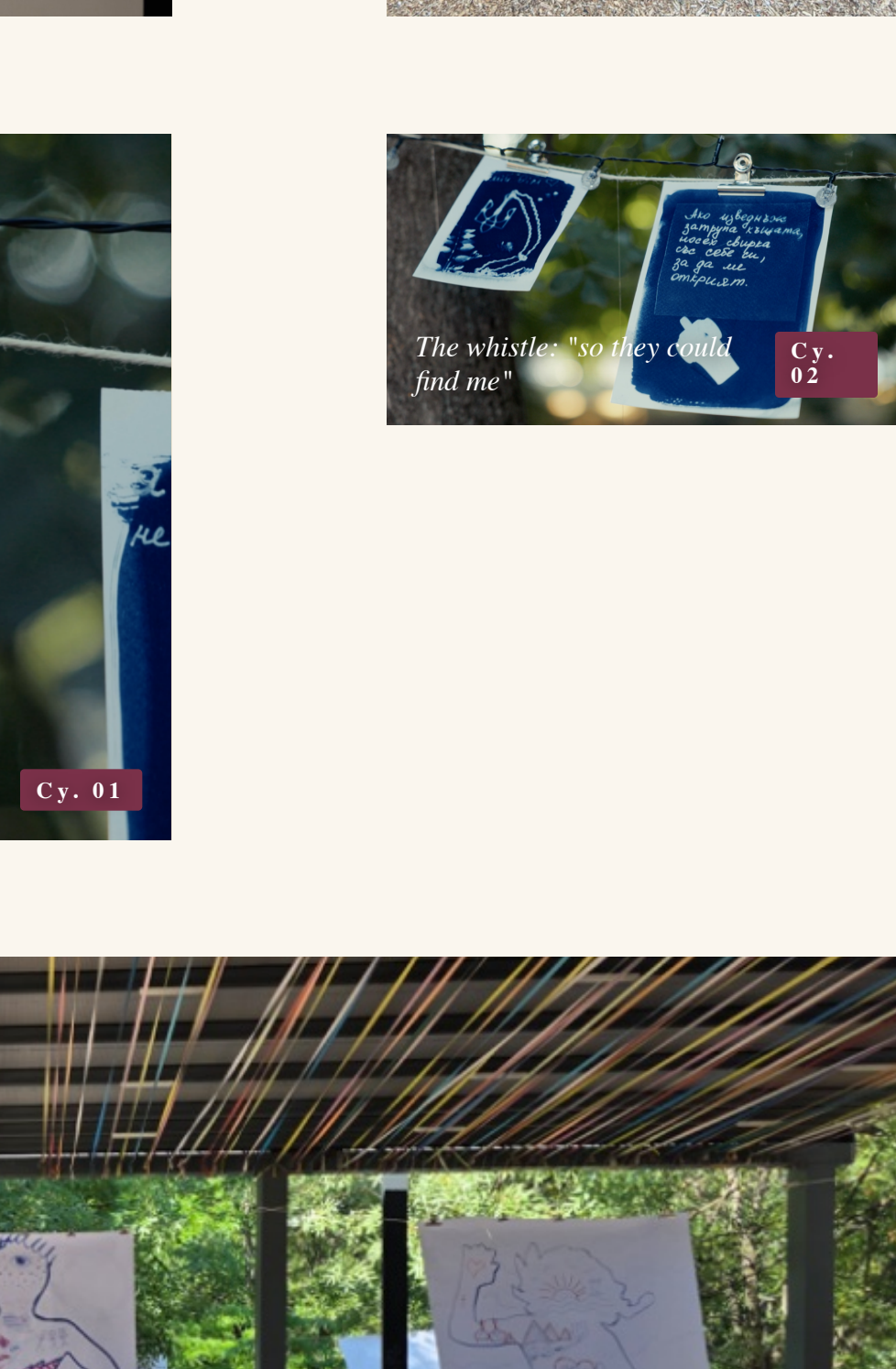
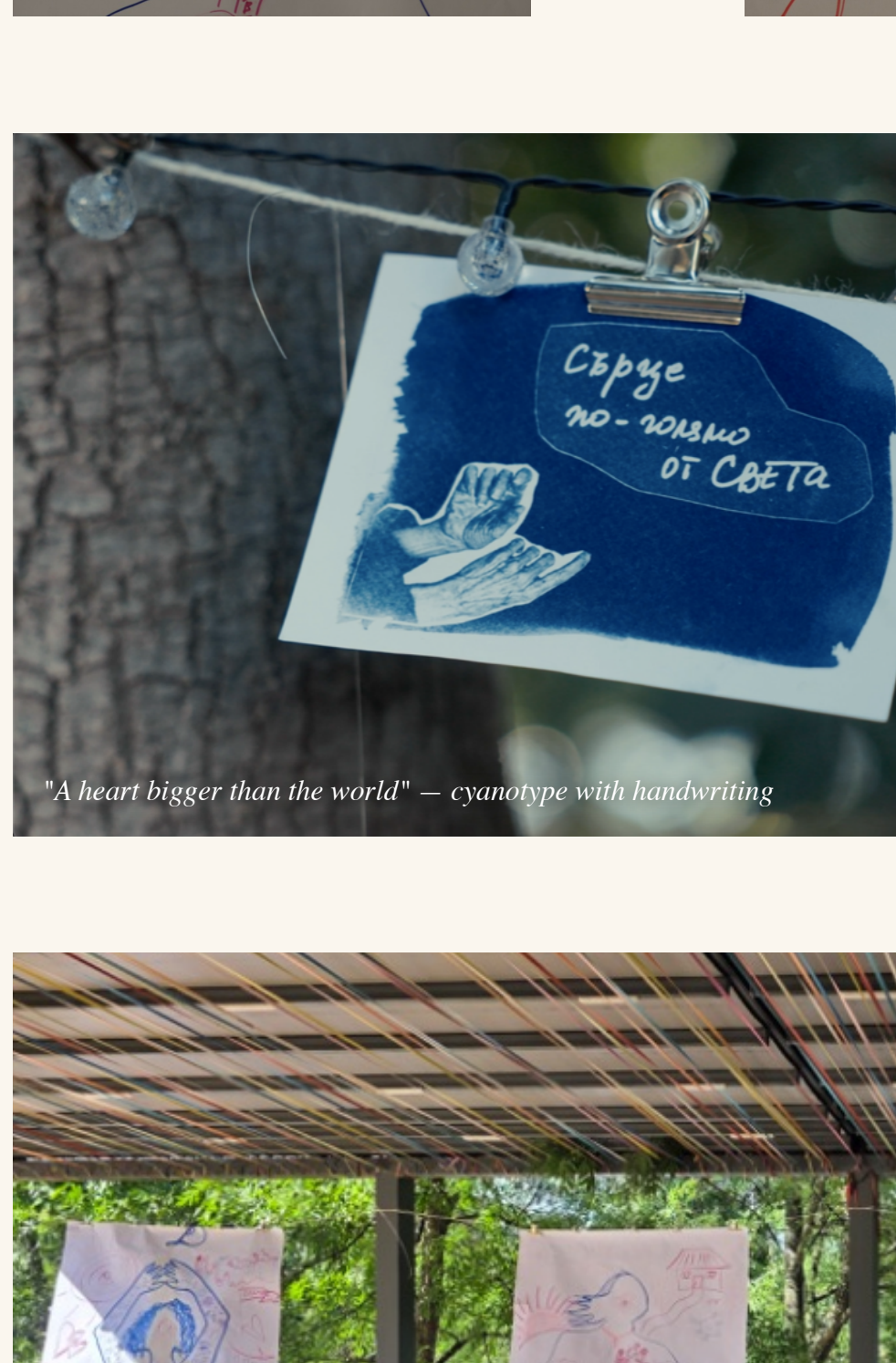
Fig. 4 — Installed as the fourth panel in the exhibition sequence.



§ 03 — Plates & Details

A closer look

Close readings of the manifestos and a series of cyanotype prints made from personal objects — a whistle, keys, a necklace, a photograph — objects carried across borders and preserved as traces of personal histories.



§ 04 — Installation, Outdoor

Between the *trees*, at dusk

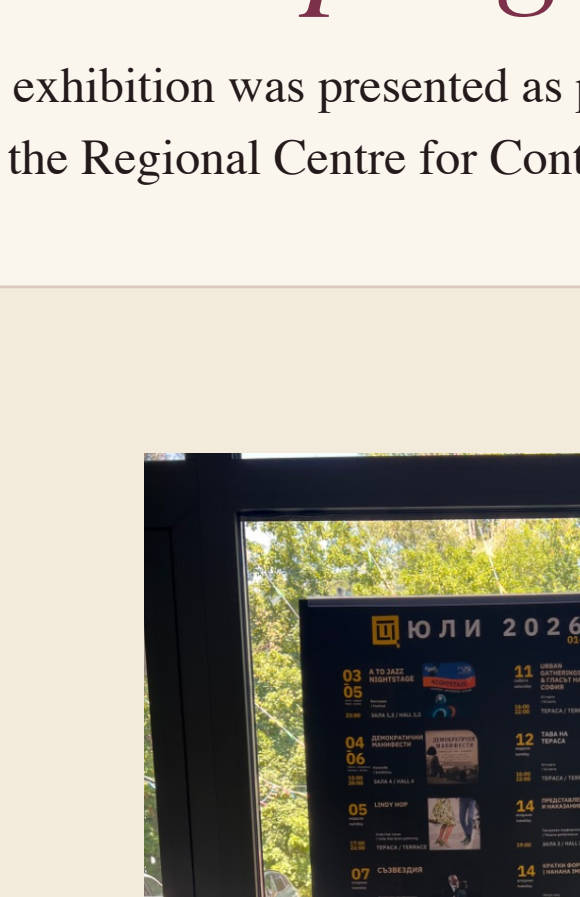
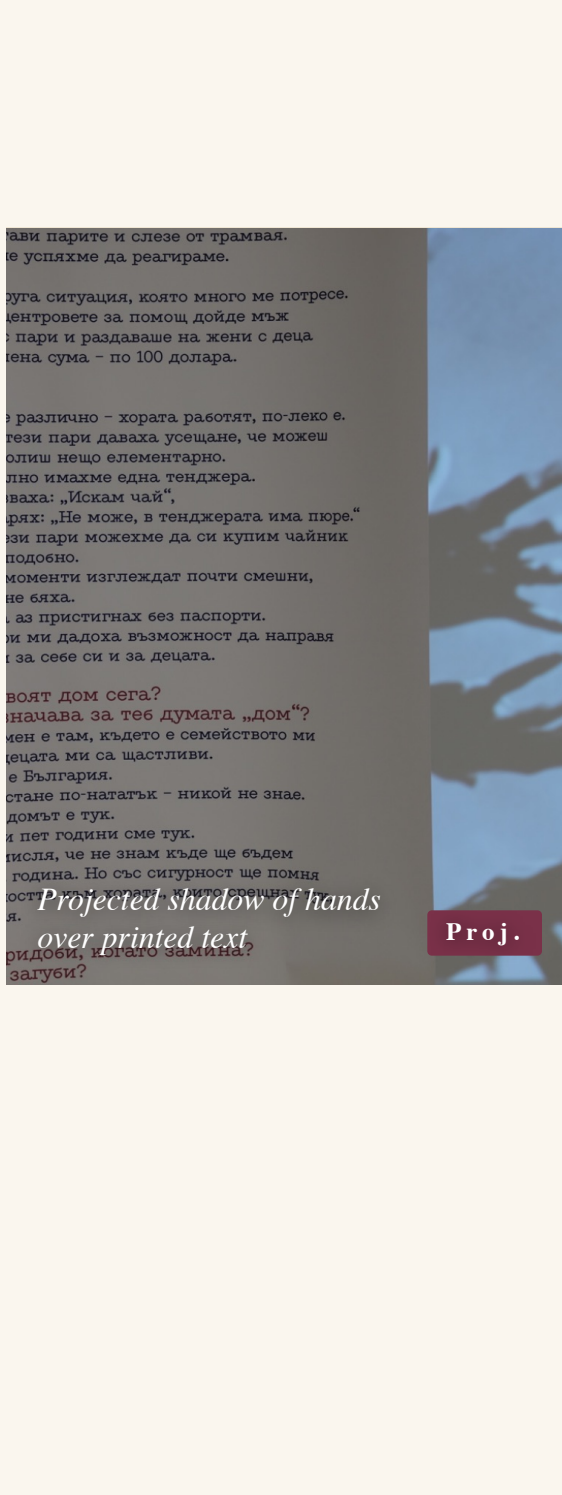
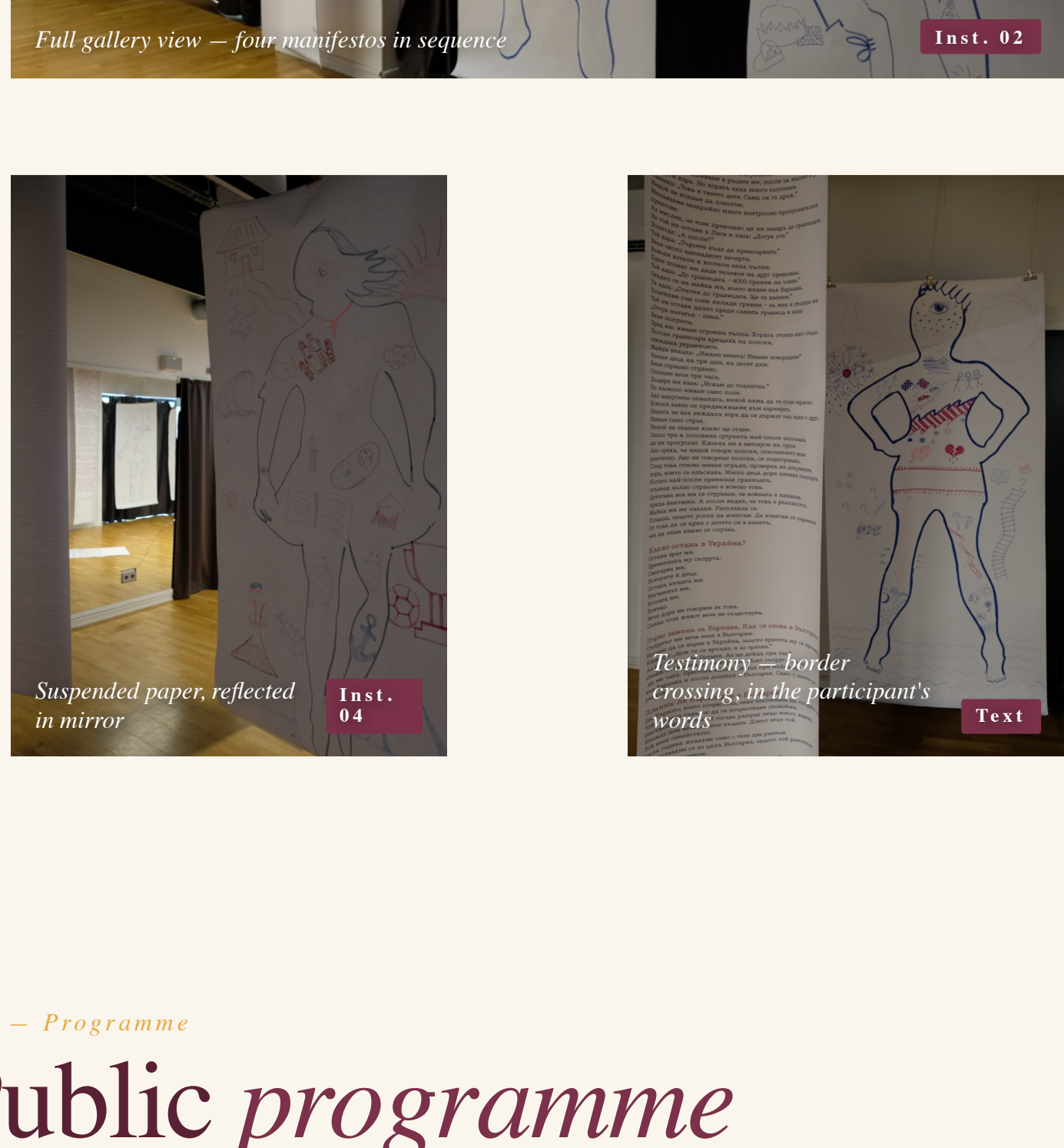
The exhibition travelled from the gallery to the outdoor space of RCCA Toplocentrala. The manifestos hung from branches; the cyanotypes were strung across the water like laundry drying in the last light.



§ 05 — Installation, Indoor

In *Hall 4* at Toplocentrala

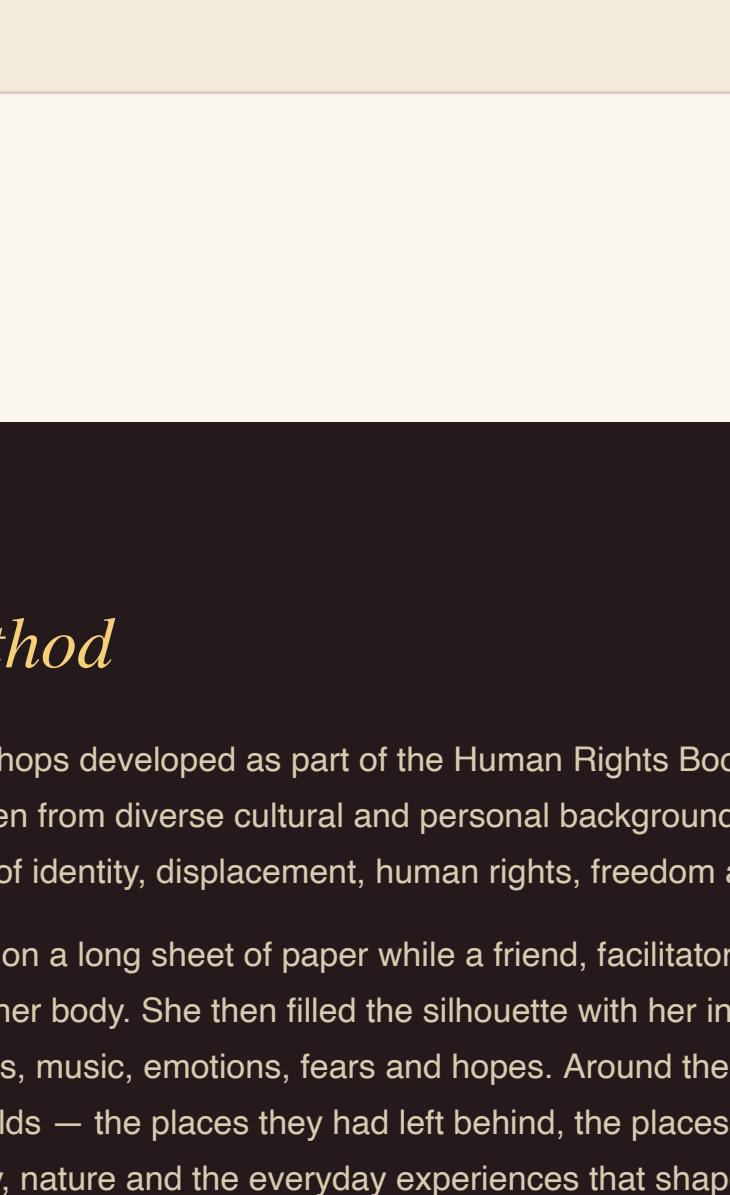
Suspended from the ceiling of Hall 4 at RCCA Toplocentrala in Sofia, the paper bodies became a walkable forest. Between them, long text scrolls carried the participants' stories in Bulgarian.



§ 06 — Programme

Public *programme*

The exhibition was presented as part of the cultural calendar of Sofia Municipality and the Regional Centre for Contemporary Arts — Toplocentrala.



PROGRAMME - JULY 2026

Democratic Manifestos on the July board

The Democratic Manifestos exhibition appeared in the July 2026 cultural programme of the Regional Centre for Contemporary Arts — Toplocentrala, placing the project within Sofia's wider civic and cultural life.

DATES 04–06 July 2026 VENUE Hall 4 • RCCA Toplocentrala

FORMAT Exhibition & talks

Free entry — in Bulgarian and Ukrainian, with English and Arabic translation available on request.

A note on method

Through a series of workshops developed as part of the Human Rights Booster project, refugees and migrant women from diverse cultural and personal backgrounds were invited to explore their experiences of identity, displacement, human rights, freedom and belonging.

Each participant lay down on a long sheet of paper while a friend, facilitator, or sometimes a child traced the outline of her body. She then filled the silhouette with her inner world: people, memories, objects, animals, music, emotions, fears and hopes. Around the body, participants mapped their external worlds — the places they had left behind, the places they now call home, borders, war, family, nature and the everyday experiences that shape their lives.

Each visual manifesto was accompanied by an in-depth interview, allowing the images to enter into dialogue with the woman's own words, memories and reflections.

The creative process also incorporated cyanotype, an early photographic printing technique that uses light-sensitive materials and sunlight to produce distinctive blue-and-white images. Participants selected personal and symbolic objects, plants and materials — some brought with them from their homelands, others chosen for the deep personal meaning they carry. Exposed to sunlight, these objects left photographic traces, becoming visual imprints of memory, identity, belonging and connection to home.

Together, the body maps, personal narratives and cyanotypes create layered portraits of women whose individual experiences become Democratic Manifestos — personal reflections on dignity, freedom, rights, belonging and the kind of society they want to be part of.

CONCEPT

Arms Wide Open Association

PROJECT LEAD

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PHOTOGRAPHY

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CATALOGUE

Volume I • Sofia • 2026

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