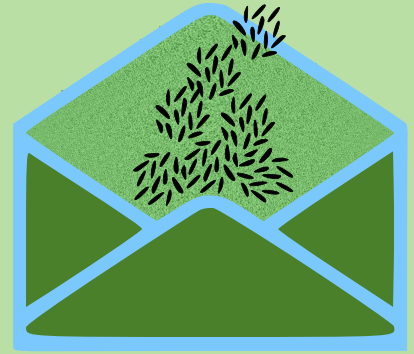


Ishtar's International Network of Feral Gardens

DISPATCH 002



Lamenting: Storytelling Series

From June 10 - July 1, 2024 we invited artists, Farida Rady, Dayananda Nagaraju, Dana Prieto, and Mariam Magsi to share how their relationships to the earth grounds them in times of grief. Whether it be tending to plants after losing a loved one, *Lamenting* the destruction of the environment, or holding the deep sorrow of witnessing genocide and rising fascism. Reflecting on seasons of grief, the growing cycle provides a pathway for making sense of the tangible and intangible aspects of loss. Tending to life is to tend to death. From sowing flowers beside tombs and planting trees to honour the dead, to using plants to detoxify soil and mitigate the climate crisis, to retreating to a quiet garden to mourn alongside birds. In times of grief, we return to our relationship to the earth in a myriad of ways.

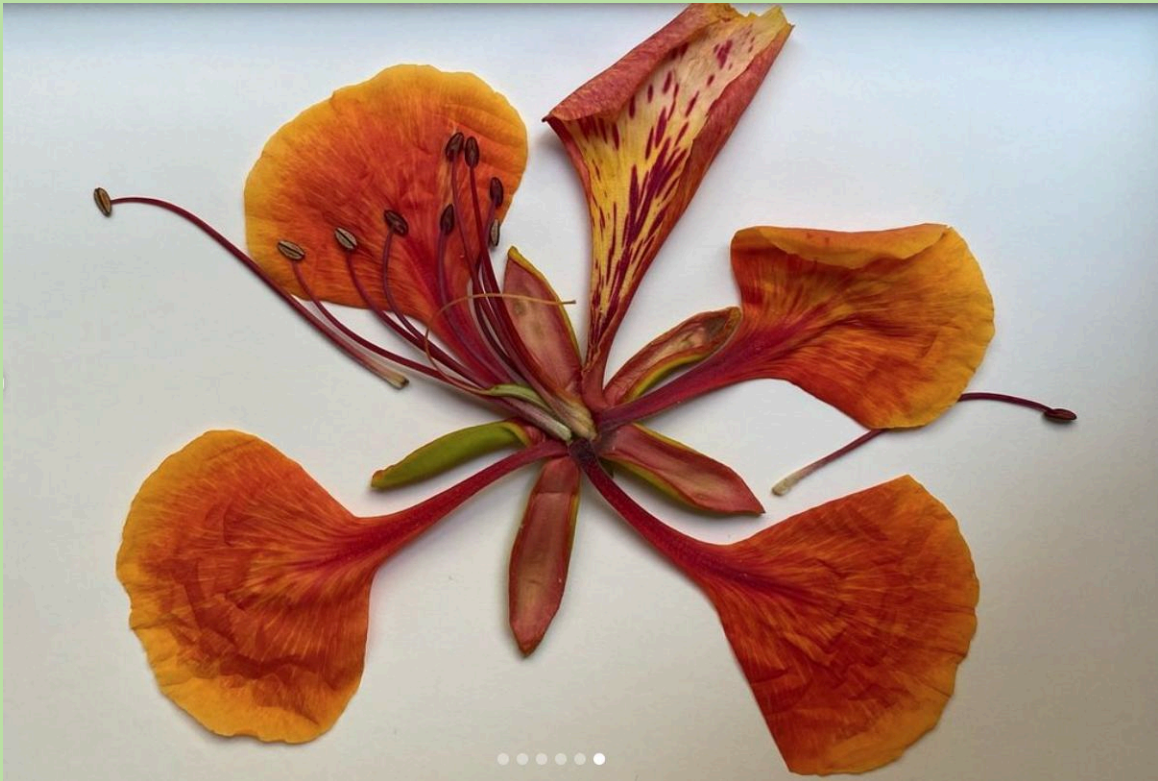
Farida Rady

Sometimes these “small” gaps in knowledge and experience in our lands mark us as diasporic & lie at the crux of much more.



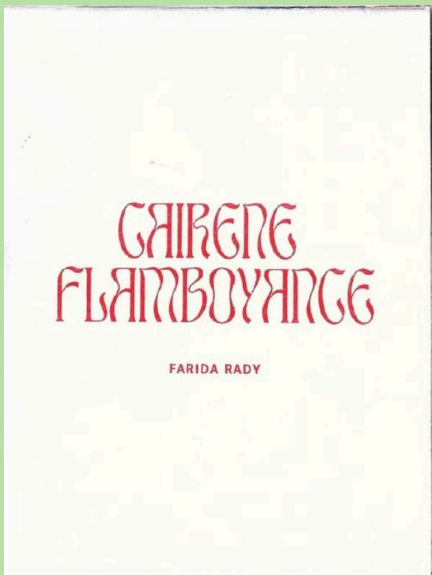
[June 10, 2024](#)

I've been tending to my “grief garden” for over five years, and it's located in personal & collective losses, migrations, and my connection to the places that have hosted me. The garden grows attunement, awe, attention, and clarity. My immediate losses acquaint me with grief, and if I let grief become a portal to deep and mobilizing love, I can alchemize my collective grief towards liberation.



[June 13, 2024](#)

The royal poinciana tree, also known as the flamboyant/flame of the forest, blooms in June. June 2022 marked my first return to Cairo during its peak bloom. I had seen traces of its bloom on Cairo's streets in the past, but learning that a flame of the forest stood right outside my childhood bedroom window, without my knowledge of that [for 20 years] was bittersweet and heavy. Sometimes these "small" gaps in knowledge and experience in our lands mark us as diasporic & lie at the crux of much more. Here is a risograph zine - thanks [@colourcodeprint](#) - made with photographs from that visit, and an accompanying poem❤️



Dayananda Nagaraju

ಹಿತ್ತಲ ಗಿಡ ಮದ್ದಲ್ಲ *A medicinal plant in the backyard is not medicine.*



[June 17, 2024](#)

Beyond the practical contributions, our gardens serve as sanctuaries— refuge where we find solace and communion with natural world. Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world, once a utilitarian pursuit driven by practical and medicinal needs, gardening has gradually transitioned into a more ornamental endeavour focused on aesthetics. The Kannada proverb " ಹಿತ್ತಲ ಗಿಡ ಮದ್ದಲ್ಲ " ("A medicinal plant in the backyard is not medicine") encapsulates this shift, serving as a reminder of the changing dynamics between humans and the natural world.



As a farming family deeply ingrained in the rhythms of the land, we hold reverence for both our agriculture fields and nourishing gardens. Yet our gardens hold a distinct allure. Fond memories of my childhood in my grandmother's village near Mysuru, often watching my mother and grandmother cook. The garden in the Hittal (backyard) provided green chillies, tomatoes, mint, various vegetables, and fruits. The freshness of the vegetables, mint, and fruits is something I can never forget. This memory beautifully exemplifies the timeless, yet fast diverging connection between humans and nature.



[June 22, 2024](#)

Gardening, as opposed to agriculture, has taken an interesting turn in the lives of the common urban man. This scenario is juxtaposed with the capitalistic, utilitarian notion of 'usefulness', but limited to individual self-gratification. Gardening or farming, are not all that disparate in my opinion. They share the common notion of man's inherent relationship with the soil, in explicating her natural tendencies to be in servitude with nature and in turn, be served by it in spiritual and utilitarian ways. Alas, the human kind has forgotten this umbilical connect to the soil, to give rise to the more hedonic aspects of the act of planting. The kitchen garden now serves within the conduit of consumptions cape, acting at the periphery of utilitarian conduct. This endangers the usability and the spiritual worth of 'sowing the seed' and watching it grow.

[Watch Dayananda and our Executive Director Indu Vashist in conversation about grief, growing, and his artistic practice.](#)



Dana Prieto

[June 26, 2024](#)

A few years back, I was walking alongside Etobicoke Creek, bordering Lake Ontario and into the Arsenal Lands, finding points of departure for a site-responsive artwork commissioned by the 2022 [@torontobiennial](#), curated by Candice Hopkins, Katie Lawson and Tairone Bastien. After months of wandering visits, I came across an unassuming grassy mound bordered with a low fence, right between the Small Arms Inspection Building and the lake shore. Tall stems of goldenrods and a small sign emerge from the field. DO NOT DIG.

That bounded meadow contains 70,000 tons of radioactive waste that were removed from surrounding grounds in an ongoing process of remediation and due to the neglectful use of those lands by the Canadian army over 100 years ago.

I was then carrying my son inside my womb, and I couldn't stop thinking about how the land holds and leaks, about the porosity of the land and of all the living beings roaming in and around it.

We are enmeshed in a temporality of damage that exceeds time. And yet, goldenrods grow, flower, and seed, becoming food and remedy for the soil underneath. Tall stems and a small sign for us to remember.

How will the land remember us?

I am deeply wary of hope.



[June 28, 2024](#)



I recently had the honour to take part in an artist-cooked and dreamt dinner, orchestrated by the incomparably kind and brilliant Richard Fung, as part of GTA24, curated by Kate Wong, Toleen Touq, and Ebony Haynes at MOCA.

Richard invited Lisa Myers, and then they brought together Immony Mèn, Peter Morin and myself to share a meal and a story in connection with the theme "Substitution." The event was profoundly moving and the stories shared are still reverberating in my soul.

My offering included a single ingredient, prickly pear or tuna, carefully overcooked for several hours until left with a thick syrup or arrope. Often consumed as a jam back home, arrope is traditionally taken as medicine to treat throat aches and other ailments.

I shared tuna or sabr because it is a powerful remedy, and because in spreading across the world this cactus has entangled radical stories of remediation, creativity, and resilience wherever it lands.



Native to Mexico, sabr has been cultivated in Palestine for hundreds of years, used for fencing and dividing land, and celebrated in the summer for their sweet and refreshing fruits. I have been reading about sabr through the knowledge of people whose bodies and lands are being massacred in an ongoing genocide.

Since our GTA24 dinner program, I learned that MOCA is partially funded by Scotiabank, which is heavily invested in the destruction of Palestine through Elbit Systems, the largest Israeli weapons manufacturer.

I am deeply wary of hope.

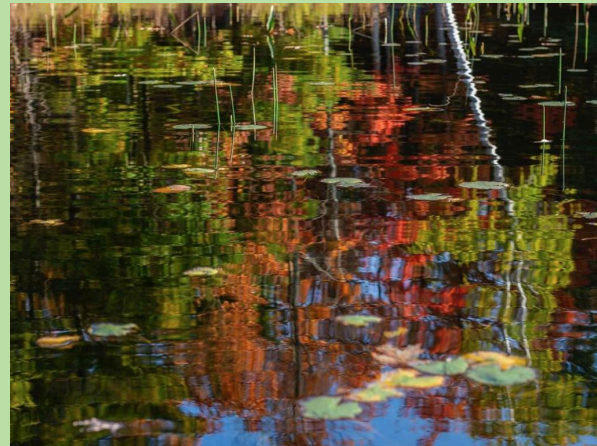


Still. The robust calls for institutional accountability, transparency, and divestment shimmer, at the very least, a form of fertility that draw new collective ethical boundaries and the necessity of cultivating otherwise, elsewhere. I would bring with me some tuna seeds wherever that is.

#NoArmsInTheArts

Mariam Magsi

Grief is a testament to immense love for a person, a place, or our former selves.



[July 1, 2024](#)

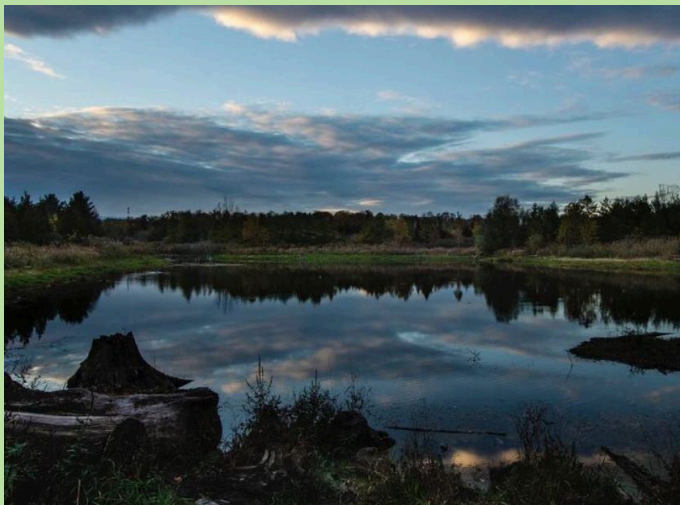
My name is Mariam Magsi. In 2019, I lost my mother to cancer, and soon after, I was diagnosed with a neurological disability that took away many of life's joys that I am learning to reclaim in new ways.

Since the pandemic began my beloved and I have mourned the loss of over 13 elders in our networks. Distance deprived us of the ability to bid them farewell.



In 2022, floods ravaged my homeland, Pakistan. I watched my loved ones incur immeasurable losses with unwavering resilience. Last month, after attending a protest for Palestine, I returned home to find my own apartment flooded, leading to temporary displacement and unforeseen material losses.

In our brief, fleeting lifetimes, we endure and survive so much. Processing grief through art has been a steadfast companion through trying times. However, it is communion with nature, whether tending to a balcony garden, spending time in gardens nurtured by loved ones, or immersing in wild nature, that I truly began to understand that grief is as vital as joy. Grief is a testament to immense love for a person, a place, or our former selves. The complex, often overwhelming co-existence of grief and joy reveals the depth of our humanity.



Over the next week, I invite you to convene with me in a digital garden sanctuary, where we will embrace our grief and our joy through photography, poetry, memory, prayer, mindfulness, and song.



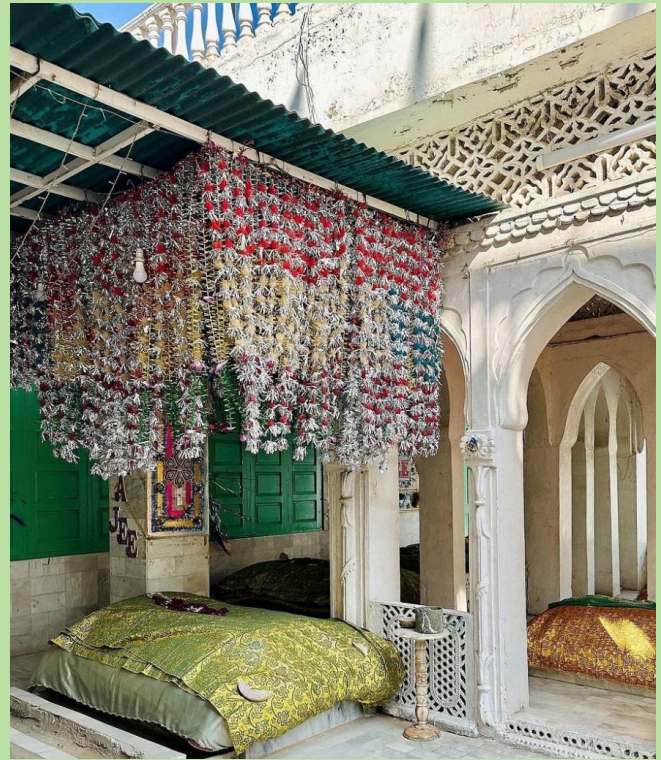
[July 3, 2024](#)

Where I come from, the tradition of adorning our deceased with flowers is a practice that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. This act of reverence and decoration is particularly poignant in the context of Sufi traditions, where flowers symbolize purity, love, and the ephemeral nature of life.

At Sufi shrines, or Dargahs as we call them, scattering rose petals over the graves of saints is a sign of devotion, and a means to invoke blessings. The intoxicating fragrance of roses can bridge earthly and spiritual realms, opening portals to connect with the divine.



The Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, India, is a prominent example where rose petals are an integral part of the rituals. Devotees, pilgrims, saints and sinners of every class, religious, racial and gender background imaginable, bring garlands and plastic bags filled with loose petals to place over the tomb of the saint, creating a vibrant, fragrant layer that symbolizes love and veneration. Similarly, at Tajuddin Mazaar, where our Sufi saint Baba Anwar Shah Taji rests, in Meva Shah, Sindh, the Dargah is ornamented with a colourful profusion of fresh rose petals and golden marigolds, creating a visually striking, yet serene atmosphere for reflection and prayer.



When I visit my mother's resting site in the city of Lahore, nestled within the Punjab province of Pakistan, my first stop is the mobile flower shop erected at the gates of the historic cemetery that is home to fallen soldiers, poets, Sufi saints and dervishes. After filling recycled thailis (plastic bags) with an abundance of roses, I mindfully make my way to her grave site, careful not to step over ants feasting on grains left behind by visitors. I shower her forever home with flowers, watching in wonder, as the petals gently cascade over her tomb like a soft waterfall.

These historic rituals highlight the significance of flowers in South Asian funerary practices. Through fragrant gifts and action-oriented offerings, we, the living, honour our dead, and remember them, momentarily suspended within the timeless beauty of nature's blooms.

We want to thank the artists for participating in *Lamenting: Storytelling Series*

Farida Rady - [@farida.archives](https://www.instagram.com/farida.archives)

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Dana Prieto - [@dana__prieto](https://www.instagram.com/dana__prieto)

Mariam Magsi - [@mariam_magsi](https://www.instagram.com/mariam_magsi)