

In Collaboration with Mugwort

*CST,
embodied art,
herbal practice,
dance and
movement.*

Artists and craniosacral therapists, Katsura Isobe and Ann-Marie Fairbrother share an impulse to explore art informed by craniosacral principles. In looking for an opportunity to collaborate, their starting point was a desire to engage more deeply with the local nature of Hackney Marshes in east London and a curiosity for what may emerge in the meeting between Katsura’s dance and movement art and Ann-Marie’s art and herbalism. Rather than have an idea of what the collaborative piece would look like in the end, their intention was to be in each moment of the creative process and allow the work to unfold.

In Collaboration with Mugwort is the art project they jointly presented at Chisenhale Dance Space in 2021 and at Dartington Hall in June 2022. *Artemisia vulgaris*, or common mugwort, is a native plant recognised for its medicinal and esoteric properties of which dreaming is one. Their individual experiences of how CST informed their artistic process have inspired the following reflections.



WALK IN THE PATH, NOT ON THE PATH

By Ann-Marie Fairbrother

Craniosacral principles root my artistic and healing perceptions in the bones, fascia, form, rhythms, and stories of the body. Our body, our bit of Earth, is where we can be guardians of health and relationship both within ourselves and the planet at large.

Pathways of art, nature, and healing are rivers converging through me, flowing into and nourishing each other. An artist, healer, craniosacral therapist and herbalist, I have worked creatively with people from all walks of life through art, nature connection, and therapeutic practices for nearly 30 years. The story I want to share is about how craniosacral principles guide and enrich my artistic and herbal work.

I believe that artmaking is being called into the ocean depths to bring treasure to land. These art objects, now manifest, tell a story of their own, shedding light and insights, making art a territory that provides new viewing points. As such, art can sit both without and within the definition of therapy; for my work, it brings in a dynamic, creative element, a kindling of vitality.

CST practices of deep listening through the felt senses of the body, seeing with the inner eye, hearing with the inner ear and being present as a compassionate witness feed into my creative process, connection with nature, and approach to herbal medicine.

Reflecting on how CST informs my creative process, I find that I apply fundamental CST principles to my artistic work. Engagement with my creative self, open and without pressure or expectations but being present to the field and open to what arises. Allowing the play and sparkle of inspiration, space and time to kindle. Following ideas and lines of enquiry, gathering materials, and engaging with the making process. Stillness and points of balanced tension happen during the making process as ideas meet reality and land, here they may become a fulcrum that sheds insights, growth, and change. Release takes an energetic softening and melting around the realisation of the work. Reorganisation

and integration happen through reflection on the process and work as insights are embodied. Artworks become art territory that can be engaged with physically, emotionally and visually by oneself and others as an externalised fulcrum.

My love of the plant kingdom has always exerted a strong influence on my artistic and therapeutic work. My path led from a BSc in Geography to an MA in Art, a diploma in Healing, a qualification in Craniosacral Therapy, and, now, studies in herbal medicine.

I recall an image of a green herbal elixir that arrived in my mind’s eye while offering a healing treatment. Twenty years later, when my CST tutor Andrew Stones introduced his ‘homeocurative’ method, offering thought forms of homeopathic remedies during CST treatments, I wondered if I may work with plants in a similar way.

As I study herbal medicine, I am drawn to the experiential, embodied and imaginal methods of engagement championed by herbalist Nathaniel Hughes. To meet a plant in this way, one must recognise it as a living being. To begin, I drop into my practitioner fulcrum and use the language of my CST training and practice to engage and perceive through my whole being and into specific body systems. As I sit or drink a herbal infusion, I observe how this plant’s being meets me energetically, viscerally, emotionally, and with inner vision. Hughes talks of how once someone has brought a plant into their heart, they may approach someone with, for example, ‘Rose fingers’ during bodywork. As I deepen into this embodied relationship with members of the plant kingdom, they may step forward during a CST treatment, if called for.

I met Katsura on a CST postgraduate course in embryology. Having found the art world stressful

at times we both had intentions to work from an authentic place where we could allow our creative process to unfurl and hold space for an artistic process akin to that used in CST practice.

Meeting on Hackney Marshes, we explored ideas of running sessions with people in or with nature, combining Katsura's CST and authentic movement and my CST, herbal and interactive art practice. In the summer of 2021, we came together to collaborate in a residency at Chisenhale Dance Space in London. We immersed ourselves in the marshes in the morning and shared our practices, each leading a session, in the afternoon. I shared methods of embodied and creative engagement with mugwort, which seemed to offer itself from the marsh to be part of this creative process.

To engage, we meditated, moved, wore, dreamt, made, and found words with mugwort, allowing space for and being open to what arose. We held this space for and with each other.

Following this process, I realised two artworks made from and on the marsh, **Cyanotypes Silk Prints & Mugwort Dreambed**, which embodied words that came to me:

**'Ancient crone holds me
softly in the great mystery'**

In 2022, Katsura and I further developed our work and presented **In Collaboration with Mugwort** as a participatory event at Dartington Hall in Devon.

Afterwards, we walked down to the river with the mugwort that was left. As we walked along the pathways through fields and woods, I felt its presence.

'Walk in the path, not on the path'

Now I was a living part of the path and not a visitor. And now our work was done, all was released. 🌿

Ann-Marie Fairbrother *Seeking to enhance people's connection with nature, endeavouring to promote greater understanding, wellbeing and value, Ann-Marie combines healing, herbalism and bodywork at her practice in East London.*

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Nathaniel Hughes **'Intuitive Herbalism'** and **'Weeds in the Heart'**
Thomas Attlee **'Cranio-Sacral Integration'**
Andrew Stones **'Homeocurative Method'** in Ryan Halford Craniosacral podcast episode 9

Images:

Mugwort Dreambed Mugwort wrapped in felt and needle felted with mugwort dyed wool. An art and therapeutic object to be experienced, offering a profound direct engagement with this plant. I experience it in a similar way to having a craniosacral treatment except one is being held by mugwort.

**A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON YIELDING IN
THE HEALING AND CREATIVE PROCESSES**

By Katsura Isobe

**I believe that CST is not just a therapy but an orientation that we can apply in all areas of life:
creative and artistic, personal and relational.**

I am a craniosacral and somatic movement therapist, and a dance and movement artist. For a long time, I had wanted to explore how to create art in the way I practise craniosacral therapy, an impulse shared by Ann-Marie Fairbrother. **In Collaboration with Mugwort** is our joint piece inspired by the meeting of CST principles, dance, movement, art and the herb mugwort.

Throughout the creative process, we repeatedly came back to the question of how to create art in the way we practise CST. Now, as I sit and reflect on the whole creative journey, I am with the particular quality that I experienced in some moments during the creation. When we encountered difficulties and the creative flow became stagnant, I found myself frantically searching for an answer; I wanted to overcome the problems and feel settled. These were the moments when I reminded myself to breathe, soften, and open up for something to arise. Reflecting on this quality, I decided to name it yielding; because as I check in with my body softening and opening, I also notice that I am receiving the downward flow of gravity. I borrow the word *yielding* from Linda Hartley's writings on perinatal development where it means actively surrendering the body to gravity or other external forces to prepare for a push against what the body is against ¹.

In my life, the last several years have been a constant search for a sustainable way of living without burning out. In 2014, I felt utterly depleted after pushing hard to survive and thrive in dance for 25 years. My old pattern of doing a project was to try hard and rush to make a shape that is tangible to myself and others. Shaping made me feel safe. When Ann-Marie and I started working together, we talked about how we were exhausted by the art and dance world, where we felt judged by others and needed to prove ourselves all the

time. Since then, studying and practising the healing modality of CST has introduced me to the profoundness of pausing, of being still and going in the direction of ease.

As I rekindled my artistic project, prompted by the pandemic, I was convinced that I wanted to make art to nourish myself. I also wondered if there is a way to offer my art to the world as an extension of the nourishment I receive from it. Hartley sees the artist's creative process as a sacred and healing function for the world ². My intention was to engage fully in my creative process without concern for what it would ultimately become.

In CST, we orient ourselves to the inherent healing vitality of a whole person. Thomas Attlee defines

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the inherent treatment process in Integrative CST as the phases of engagement: allowing, following, stillness, release and reorganisation. The creative process may not necessarily follow the CST process. Still, I particularly notice the resonance in my gut between the phase of allowing in CST and the moments of yielding in the creative process when I remind myself to soften, open up and drop down. Attlee describes the phase of allowing as a state of witnessing and containing the responses and the changes happening within the system. There is no impulse towards a goal ³.

Inspired by the CST's view on a whole person, I wonder if an artistic dance and movement work can be a system orienting to manifest its own unique life. I may just be a witness and not in control of its development.

My current movement practice is based on Authentic Movement, originated by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s as 'movement in depth' and influenced by Jungian psychology. Further development was taken in a mystical and spiritual direction by Janet Adler and Linda Hartley. I was drawn into this movement practice just after I completed my CST training, searching for a more nourishing way to engage in dance, keeping the love with me and letting go of the hate.

In Authentic Movement, I move with my eyes closed, listening very closely to my sensation and

feeling. I carefully follow my little step in each moment to carry myself forward. I choose to pause until I hear the inner voice of wants. I avoid rushing to move to occupy myself or from the anxiety of the unknown. I keep tracking my sensation and feeling as I continue moving. Sometimes, I find myself moved by something other than my conscious intention, an impulse which could be initiated by movement or sound in the room or outside. There are some moments when I feel I am part of the interconnected phenomena. It is difficult for me to separate my Authentic Movement practice from my CST practice. In both, I practise yielding; I soften, open up, drop down and trust for something to arise. And there, what emerges is the next step I follow.

In June 2022, at the public presentation of **In Collaboration with Mugwort** at the Sentient Performativities symposium by art.earth at Dartington Hall, Ann-Marie and I offered a participatory event where the audience experienced a series of engagements with mugwort, a herb that is said to stimulate lucid dreaming. After a mugwort tea meditation, the audience witnessed me move.

I dance to meet myself. In the silent emptiness that I create in myself, I start seeing the rich subtleness that I have not noticed before. In this expansion of the emptiness, we are mere particles of me, you and the mugwort. As I move, the sensations tell me that I am here. The emotions and feelings come and go through my cells. Sometimes, I receive gifts of images or words. We, our particles, resonate with each other in this space. There are no clear separations between me, you and the mugwort. Let all emerge from this interconnected dream. What will we become as a whole? ⁴

After my dance, the audience members were one by one invited to lie down on Ann-Marie's **Mugwort Dreambed** while others made objects to wear with some mugwort. Several minutes in, something happened in the room. I saw some people moving eloquently with their mugwort, someone admiring the hanging print and another meditating in their seat. Each of us seemed to be in their dream. They did not look like the audience any longer. They were generating something in the deep state and sharing it with others. They took

turns to rest, witness others and shift to another activity within their own timings. Someone's audible breaths became voices and, soon joined by others, the room was filled with divine sounding. I was astonished and welcomed the potent energy embracing us. It was like a shared dream where each of us was yielding. It felt like this could go on for hours and hours although, in reality, the timeless engagements needed to be closed disappointingly at our finishing time.

I am fascinated by how Ann-Marie's and my yielding in our creative process bore the fruit of yielding for the participants at the public presentation. It showed me the artwork created in this way manifested the quality and energy we kept throughout the process more than any visible or tangible forms. As the initial question, we wondered how we could create artwork like practising CST. To me, it meant listening deeply to my internal feelings and acting genuinely from there. It also meant noticing what emerges between us in the collaborative relationship before projecting my ideas. After my experience in this project, I feel I have found a new paradigm for living and creating that is organically yielding. I believe that CST can be more than therapy; it can be an orientation that we apply in all areas of life: creative and artistic, personal and relational. Can we imagine what the world and society would be like if more people become familiar with and choose to live with this orientation?

My heartfelt gratitude to Elissa Dell, Linda Hartley, Caroline Salem, Chisenhale Dance Space, art.earth, Ann-Marie Fairbrother, Hackney Marshes and mugwort for their support on my personal and creative processes. 🐢

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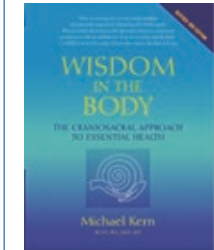
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