

# metaphysical conundrums

Sara Haq



bethlem  
gallery

Cover image: Detail of *Things I did that nobody noticed (but that changed everything)*,  
Sara Haq, 2018, photographer: Manuela Barczewski, courtesy of the artist and Bethlem Gallery

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19 May - 28 August 2021

Bethlem Gallery is delighted to announce the first UK presentation of Sara Haq's drawings *Things I did that nobody noticed (but that changed everything)* commissioned for the 10th Berlin Biennale in 2018. The exhibition also features *Putting paper in her ears*, new photographic works and objects from Haq's recent journeys in consciousness.

Grounded in practices of healing and alchemy, Haq's works are at once both visceral and immediate whilst inviting us to take the plunge into complex ideas and in unraveling *metaphysical conundrums*; described by the artist as '*delicate equations of energy and matter*'. Haq is adept at turning our attention from the minutia of daily experience and personal narrative to urgent questions relating to the mind and body, to society, nature and medicine as well as our agency within them.

Over the course of the exhibition, we will be releasing details of events as well as the launch of a newly commissioned book to accompany *metaphysical conundrums*, produced by Book Works and featuring contributions from Asiya Wadud, Paul Goodwin, Tamar Yoseloff and Yvette Mutumba.

This exhibition has been made possible with support from Arts Council England.

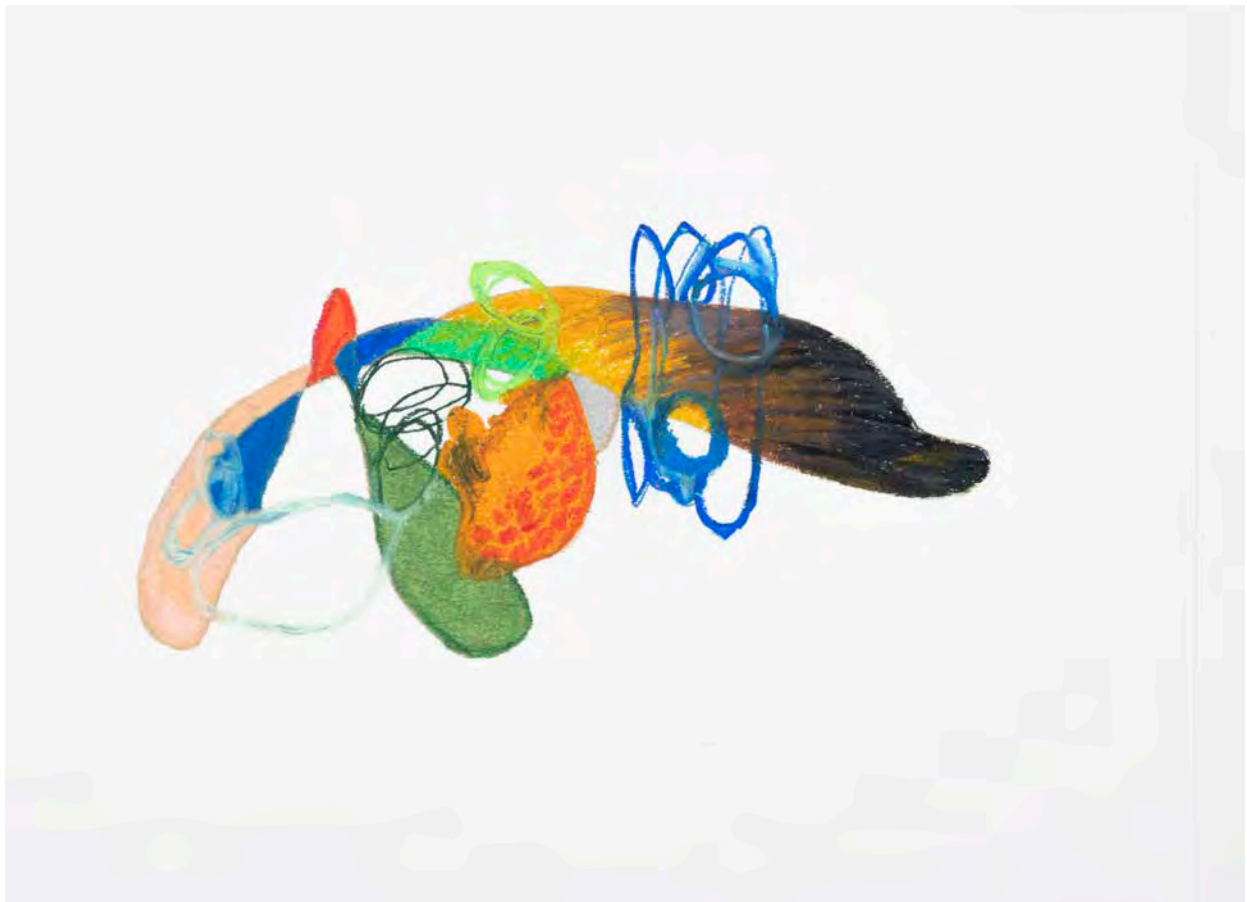


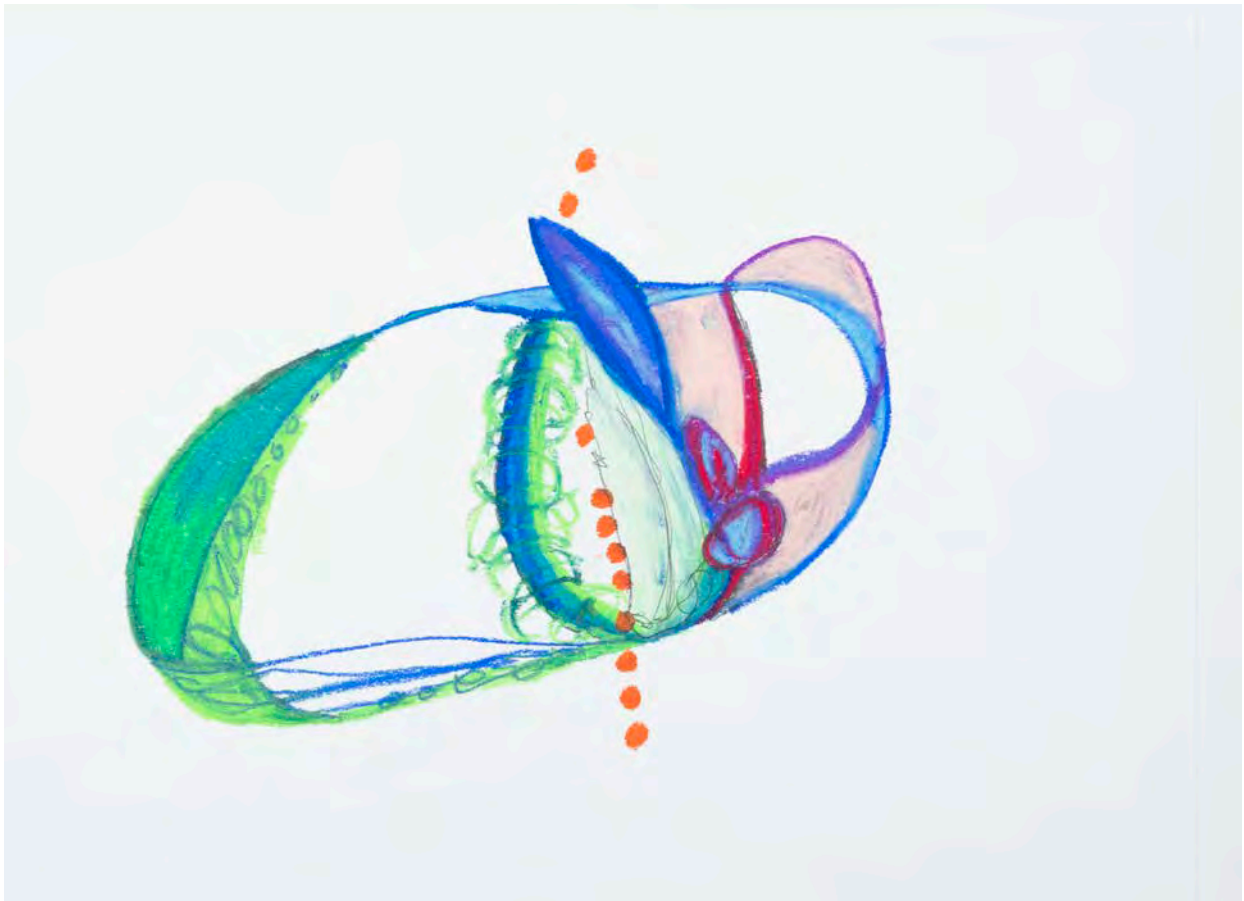
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*Things I did that nobody noticed  
(but that changed everything)*

35 drawings, Oil pastel & pencil on Fabriano paper, framed. Each: 297x420mm





I wandered through the universe.

Or, maybe I just transcended space and time.

I wandered through darkness, light, colour, warmth, life, love.

I wandered through you.

I wandered through yellow, red, violet, green, ice blue, dark blue, orange, brown, pink, grey, black.

The yellow was aching.

The red stung into my heart.

I was trapped. I managed to detangle myself, reaching towards the soothing violet.

The green gave me a hug.

The blue reminded me of eternity. The blue reminded me of the end.

The orange, a ceaseless fire.

The brown caught me with her gripping claws of hopelessness. I tried to leave.

But inside, she was full of life. So many heartbeats next to each other, melting into an eruption of beauty.

I lay down on the clouds. I sank into the earth. I felt safe.

I missed you. I found you. Every single line was you.

I sensed your fear. I wiped your tears. I heard your laugh. I saw you.

I swam through the ocean of fibers, veins, and roots.

I fell from one drop onto the other. Sliding down into half-full, not-half empty vessels.

A bed of flowers comforted me. New life grew around me.

The pink stroke my cheek.

The grey was a mist of memory wrapped around me.

The black was you. Stuck in a wormhole. You searched for eternity, but you just found the never endings of pain. The pain gave you strength. The pain lifted you above everything. You could see clearly now. The world just became a tiny grain in your generous soul. Suddenly, there was hope and life and laughter.

Your spirit sparked fires. Your mind shattered the infinity of darkness. Your body detangled itself from the clinging echoes of trauma.

You transformed pain into pleasure.

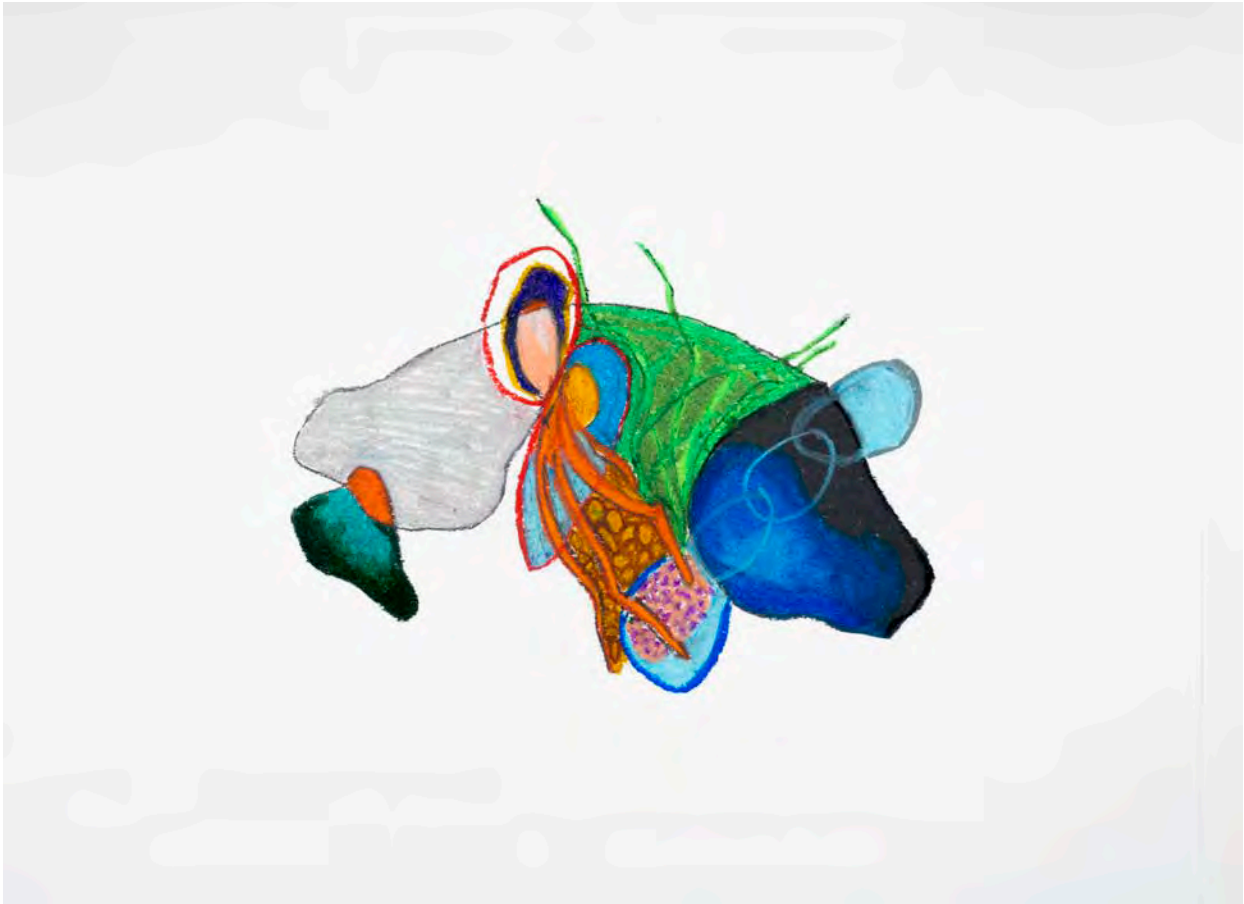
You melted into nature and nature melted into you.

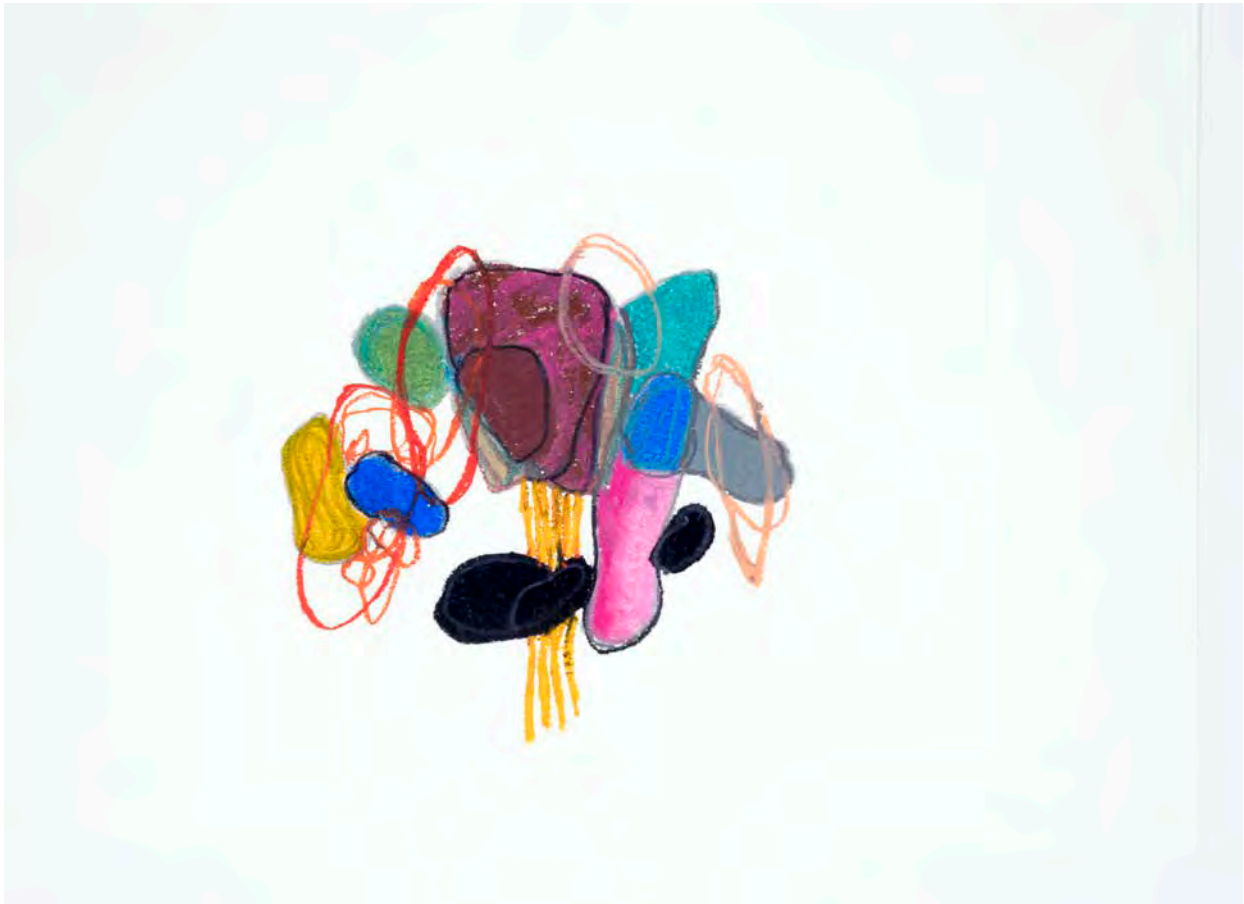
You saw the apocalypse.

You created new life from the end of time.

You healed the universe.

Nobody noticed.





From the outset, Haq's drawings are open and ambiguous, her mark making full of colours that compliment and conflict with their natural undulating forms. The drawings are rich in possible meanings; suggesting to us maps of experience, scores for a dance, planets and universes being born and dying; microbial life in all its glory where we bear witness to growth, love, war and evolution. We can see and almost feel the energy pulsating within some of the drawn forms, the energy (or 'vitality' as Haq describes it) flowing through tendrils and shoots to feed tertiary systems or to begin new life (forms).

This body of work resonates with nature in many ways but knowing more about Haq's practice and ideas, we can also conceive of it as a process to map an ecology of emotion, a measure of both subjective and collective experience. Haq's work is often born out of what can only be a sane response to an insane set of circumstances: trauma, homelessness, domestic violence, loss of welfare state, loss of rights, ill health, inequality [financial poverty], discrimination, racism, precarity, grief and system failures amongst others. Making visible these prevailing socio-political circumstances by unpicking them through a critical art practice is to swim in the opposite direction of what we might term, our mass collective psychosis.

How do we describe the indescribable? And how do we reconcile the complexities of being human: emotions, spirit, mind and body? For Haq, the cosmology unfolds in her collaborative meditative drawing practice which, as she says, is about *'getting into the nature of the body, tracking sensations and energetic impulses. Charting nuance, and the fractures and fragmentation of trauma on the psyche'*. Describing them as *'medicine drawings'*, Sara Haq's *Things I did that nobody noticed (but that changed everything)* open up space to feel.

There is something hugely inspiring in the aesthetic quality of Haq's drawings, we feel the urge to go and sit down somewhere quiet with a set of pastels ourselves; as she herself describes: the pleasure in getting her hands into something visceral and immediate.

There is much to be learnt from Haq's unique practice and she is generous with her ideas and time for others to benefit from her creative coping strategies of *'making to survive'* and *'making to thrive'*. Drawing on Sufi, Taoist, shamanic and other sacred healing practices that challenge dominant Western ideologies, she looks for the root cause of pain and distress and creates spaces for a kind of alchemy and *'conscious evolution to take place, valuing shit (fertiliser) as gold'*.

## *Putting paper in her ears*

New photographic works and objects are being shown as work in progress in Bethlem Gallery's studio space.











*Putting paper in her ears* is work in progress spanning several years comprised of photographs and objects that Haq describes as *'journeys in consciousness'*. By following an impulse and not holding back from doing something that might feel odd or strange, she improvises with everyday objects, working something out drawing on all the senses. Photographing these improvisations and moments as well as writing and collecting the objects allows Haq to retrospectively reflect and explore deeper meanings and connections to her life, work and beyond.

The title for this body of work, Haq has extracted from an observation written in her medical notes which states *'PUTTING PAPER IN EARS'*. As very immediate and logical approach to the problem of a loud psychiatric ward, Haq improvised and used scrunched up paper as ear plugs to try and reduce the noise and sensory overload.

*Putting paper in her ears* speaks to a disconnect between what may be perceived by others in a psychiatric setting versus what is actually going on for the person and opens up a conversation we hope we can all learn from. As Haq says,

*'I want us to consider a bit more closely, if someone is slowly peeling [the label from] a bottle, they are doing something for a reason, that it's a soothing and mindful activity, but it might also be that they are remaking the entire universe by peeling away a layer of something in another dimension that you don't understand because you are not there'*.

Notes after session with AA Wed 12.05.2021

Reflecting on 3 words my foundation sculpture invited us to work from  
I realise I'd almost 'cast a spell' on myself, it's taken me years to burn that contract and release to a new 'spell'.

1994		2021
Intimate	}	nudge
Violate		breathe
Expose		ripple

*Extract from the artist's notebook*



What is dreaming?

# METAPHYSICAL CONUNDRUMS.

The CAT, THE FOX hanging out on Dorset (St.) in Strickwell  
I followed the full moon <sup>to forest</sup> and ended up at the  
Blue Sea!

LAST NIGHT FULL MOON

DRAGON CASTLE - TIRED Anna, food. cat.  
Loppesfield.

UPPER FIELD

- church space. sacred circle  
healing circle. food.  
formally informal. → desire to  
create a structure  
by placing cushions  
instead of a circle.

A PILE OF CUSHIONS to allow

SELF ORGANISATION

WHAT IS THE FEAR AROUND } SELF  
BARRIERS TOWARDS } ORGANISING  
SYSTEMS

SOS.

(sending out an SOS. - sing song)

Selling drawings → as a therapeutic proced.  
people come and spend time and draw with  
me. + "take away a drawing?"  
take a pic of my insight ⇒ or  
buy drawing → more "money".  
- value -

Drawing as TOTEM - Ritual - medicine object

A few books and references from Sara (not in any particular order)

- Sami Timimi - Insane Medicine: How the Mental Health Industry Creates Damaging Treatment Traps and How you can Escape Them
- Frantz Fanon – Black Skin White Masks
- Frantz Fanon – The Wretched of the Earth
- Nayyirah Waheed – Salt
- Upile Chisala – Nectar
- Basho – On Love and Barley – Haiku of Basho
- Basho – The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches
- Lao Tzu – Tao Te Ching – translated by Stephen Mitchell
- Larry Dossey, M.D. – Space, Time & Medicine
- Deb Shapiro – Your Body Speaks Your Mind
- Karla McLaren – The Language of Emotions
- Alejandro Jodorowsky – Sacred Trickery and the Way of Kindness
- Sara Haq – Dreaming Aloud
- Sara Haq – The Overland Project
- Camden Arts Centre – The Botanical Mind – Art, Mysticism and the Cosmic Tree
- Susan Hayward – A Guide for the Advanced Soul
- R.D Laing – The Divided Self
- Martin Herbert – Tell them I Said No
- Alan Lightman – Einsteins Dream
- David Eagleman – Sum
- Ted Andrews – Animal Speak
- Thich Nhat Hanh – How to Love
- Shannon Taggart – Séance
- Dr Russell Razzaque – Breaking Down is Waking up
- Anne McIntyre – The Complete Herbal Tutor
- Barry Long – Meditation: A Foundation Course
- Deleuze and Guattari - A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia
- Nam Jun Paik – ed. Sook-Kyung Lee and Rudolf Frieling
- Natalie Tobert – Spiritual Psychiatries: Mental Health Practices in India and UK
- Kahlil Gibran – The Prophet
- Seyyed Hossein Nasr – Islamic Science – An Illustrated Guide
- Clarissa Pinkola Estes – Women Who Run with the Wolves

- Threads – feminist health, politics and experiences
- Diana Beresford-Kroeger – The Sweetness of a Simple Life
- Audre Lorde – Your Silence Will Not Protect You
- Ben Okri – A Way of Being Free
- Peter Brook – There Are No Secrets
- Stéphane Garnier – How to Live Like Your Cat
- Strange Attractors – ed. Nomaduma Rosa Masilela
- 10. Berlin Biennale: We don't need another hero – exhibition catalogue
- Diane Ackerman – The Natural History of the Senses
- Jalaluddin Rumi – The Big Red Book -Translated by Coleman Barks
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi - Flow
- <https://www.madinamerica.com/>
- <http://compassionatelymentalhealth.co.uk/>
- <https://emergingproud.com/>
- <https://www.dpt.nhs.uk/resources/peer-supported-open-dialogue>
- <https://www.nelft.nhs.uk/aboutus/initiatives-opendialogue>
- <https://spiritualcrisisnetwork.uk/>
- Peter A. Levine - On Healing Trauma
- Bessel van der Kolk – The Body Keeps the Score
- Joanna Moncrieff - The Bitterest Pills: the troubling story of antipsychotic drugs

## Podcasts

- On being with Krista Tippett
- Insights at The Edge with Tami Simon (Sounds True)
- Tara Brach
- The Great Women Artists Podcast with Katy Hessel
- Why Shamanism Now with Christina Pratt

# Events

We will be running a series of events to accompany *metaphysical conundrums*. Details will be made available on our website [www.bethlemgallery.com](http://www.bethlemgallery.com)

To keep up to date with new events and exhibitions, please subscribe to our mailing list, a submission form is featured at the bottom of each page of our website.

# Thanks

Thanks to Beth Elliott, Viv Reiss, Lucy Owen, Manuela Barczewski, Mike Ditchburn, Adrian Flaherty, Ali Glover, Yvette Mutumba, Paul Goodwin, Tamar Yoseloff, Asiya Wadud, Rob Hadrill, Book Works, Sue Barnard, Richard Ings, Simon Brown.

## Artist Acknowledgments

I dedicate my work:

To the close and dear friends, family, peers, mentors, teachers, colleagues and strangers, some no longer in this world, who've caught me time and time again, helped & held me through impossibly trying times and circumstances and who inspire me to keep seeking and sharing nourishing and creative ways though epically difficult shit. I literally would not be here without you. Thank you for bringing me home.

Bethlem Gallery & BB10 Crew: and artists: you are AMAZING! Thank you for holding space for me and honouring my work.

To all those that tirelessly care for others and especially to those too tired to care.

May the softness and wonder of life always find you.

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**Backing  
Better  
Mental  
Health.**



tangential /

which is

+

B

D

1) long

2) dies.

3) of intention pure →

4) good wisdom/knowledge -

meant from → lead from pencil

(Fe)

Iron

the contents of our blood (:) (Period) full stop

tangential / at an angle, not 'straight' obvious

just a tiny adjustment itself  
earn self made to correct mistakes

tiny interventions

↳ the flap of a butterfly wings when you pay attention

↳ work at Alexia Goethe Gallery

↳ H A H A H A H A  
H A H A H A H A H A

Healing sound to the heart.

Simplicity in life when surrounded by too much noise.

So everyone plugs into own world instead of tuning in.

How do you resonate with another.

↳ resound

hear listen

silent.

↳ sorry

love

→ what are these words in Hawaiian.



the silence of violence

can you look at your own reflection with love.

↳ forgiveness

↳ gratitude (merci beaucoup)