

# FEMINIST HIKING HEALING RETREAT

WITH THE SUPPORT OF  
URGENT ACTION FUND

Feminist Hiking Collective



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet is a co-creation resulted from the insights and knowledge shared by the participants and facilitators of the Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat. We would like to extend a huge thank you to the Urgent Action Fund for their support through the Feminist Innovation Fund, without which this wonderful collective space could not have been created.

## ABOUT URGENT ACTION FUND

Urgent Action Fund (UAF) provides support to women, trans and non-binary activists and their work, to protect and care for themselves and nurture feminist movements who are doing transformative work.

## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the retreat are young women and non-binary activists aged 18 to 35, focused on the intersection of feminism, queer and environmental activism, coming from different geographies worldwide and based in Europe.

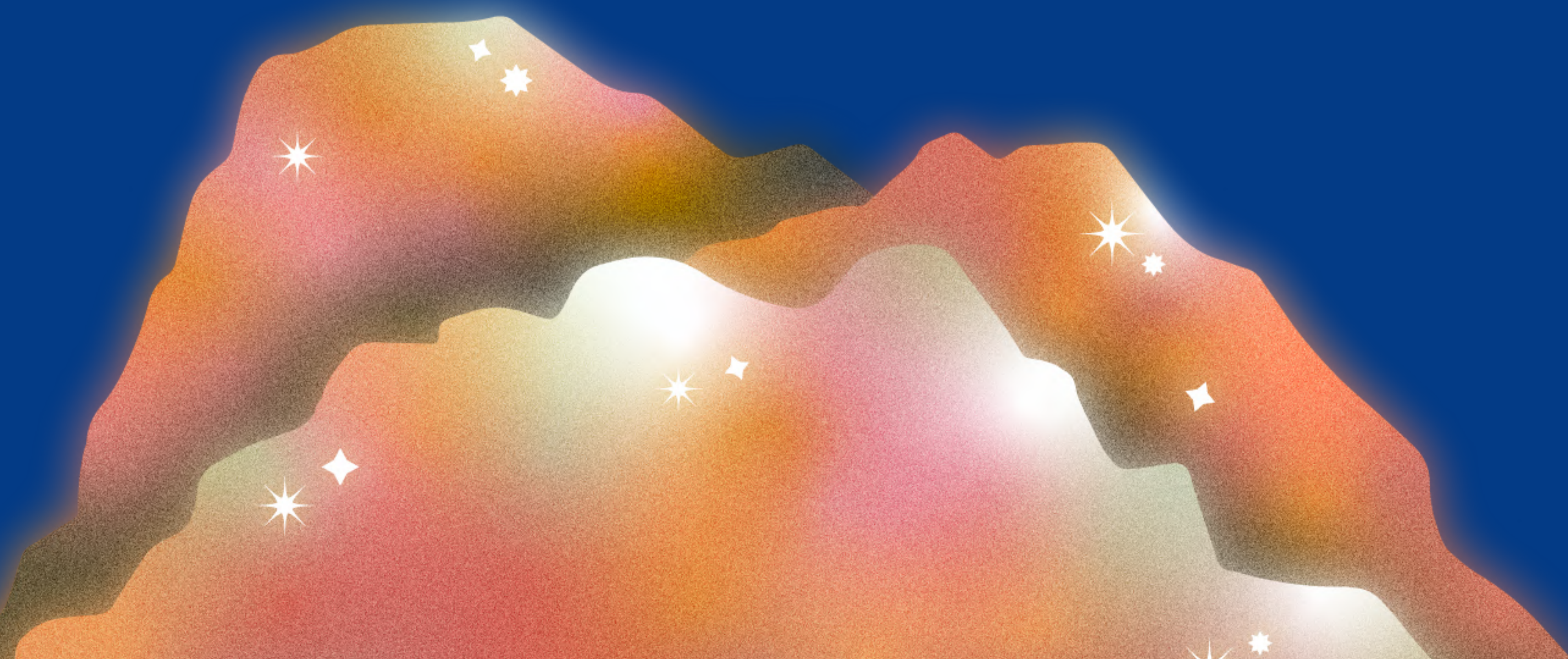
## ABOUT FEMINIST HIKING COLLECTIVE

Feminist Hiking Collective (FHC) was founded in January 2020, and registered as a non-profit organisation in Italy in May 2020. Our aim is to contribute to transformative system change through feminist popular education, research and resource co-creation; and to build collective feminist leadership and power through hiking. We wish to build a feminist world for the common good that is grounded in our belonging to nature.

Seeking to transform hierarchical and individualistic structures and spaces, we decided to build our own organisation as young feminist self-identifying women who are passionate about mountains and our connection with nature. Being able to be autonomous in our objectives, to form trusting relationships with groups, collectives and movements worldwide, and to work on our projects, was a real act of liberation for us.

## DESIGN

Ria Ryan



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# NOTE FROM FACILITATORS

*For us, it was an honour to share a space of community and embodied presence with a group of wonderful activists and a spiritually nourishing territory. It was a place of sharing and learning about different perspectives on healing, hiking and being present together in the mountains. The conversations and learnings shared were so powerful for us, and what we co-created at the retreat gives us hope for the feminist futures we seek to contribute towards.*

Ria, Elena and Ely  
Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat Facilitators





Feminist Hiking Collective



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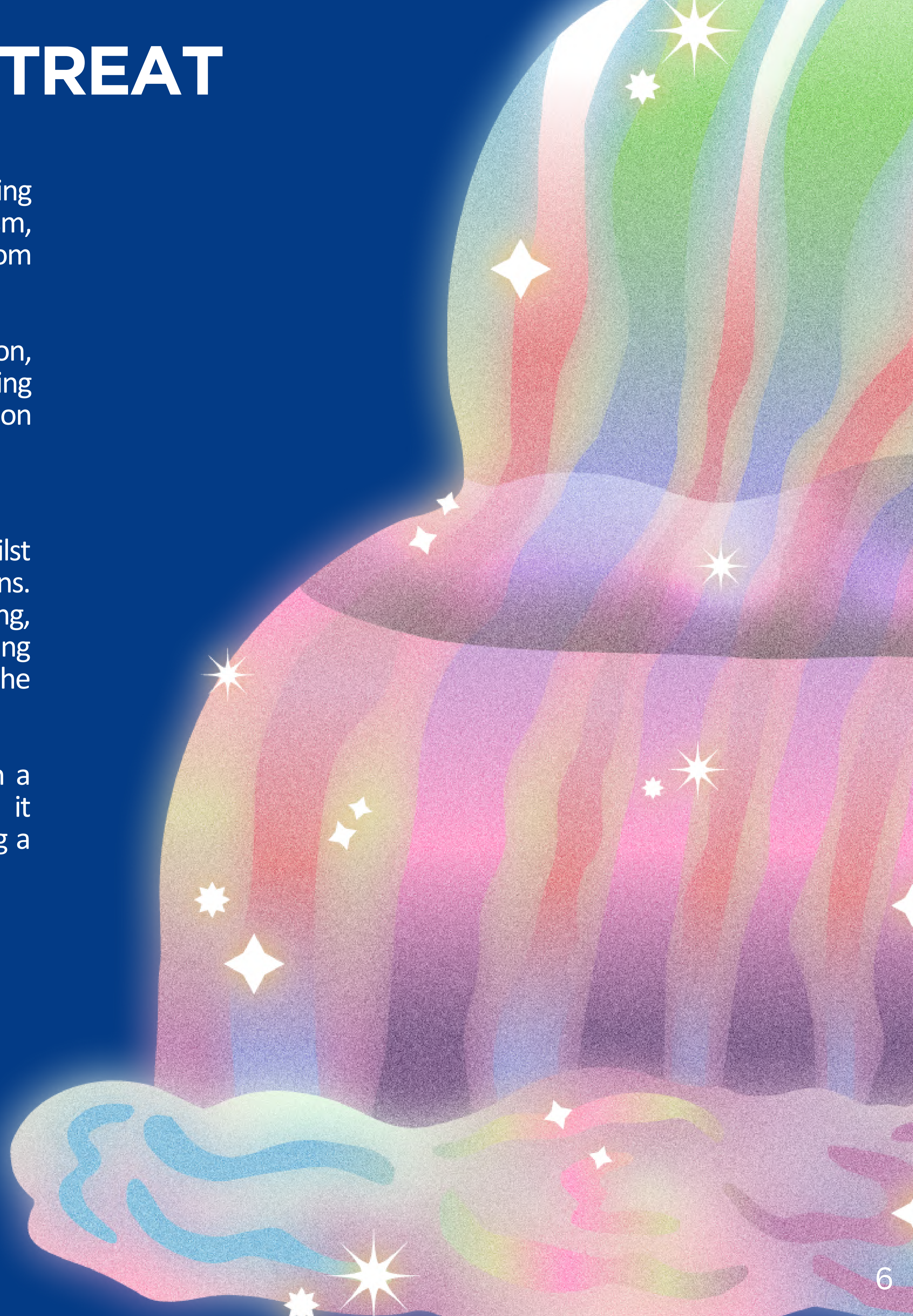
# OVERVIEW OF THE RETREAT

In September 2023, FHC organised a Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat with 15 activists focused on the intersection of feminism, queer and environmental activism, including three facilitators from FHC.

The retreat aimed to create a collective space for connection, community and healing, accompanied by a feminist hiking programme including feminist popular education (FPE) activities on power, feminist leadership and movement-building.

The retreat was a space of sharing and learning, whilst regenerating ourselves in collective grounding in the mountains. The structure of the programme consisted of five days of hiking, with FPE activities throughout, followed by stretching and sharing afterwards. The retreat was based in wonderful Val di Gresta in the Trentino region of Northern Italy.

We put our dedication and efforts to the retreat because in a society dominated by capitalism and isolation, we deemed it necessary to strengthen young activists' resilience by facilitating a space for community, embodiment and healing.



# CO-CREATING A SPACE

To establish a collective space of healing and transformation, we took the time on our first hike to discuss how we all wished the space to be. It was important for us all to co-create a space where we all felt we belonged and defined healing as a holistic process. We grounded our presence in honouring the territory and local community that welcomed us.

We discussed how to talk about distress and violence without re-traumatising each other, and the importance of acknowledging different perspectives and experiences on healing, as well as our different positionalities and privileges and the accessibility of healing spaces.

We acknowledged that healing is a need that comes from our experiences of trauma and distress in the context of a capitalist, individualistic, competitive and violent system. We addressed that “we can’t dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools” (Audre Lorde) and that understanding healing as a collective process involves deeply analysing and unlearning the framework and dynamics that are embedded in the dominant system’s approach and paradigm. We wished for the week to be a space where we could share openly and discuss healing without fear or judgement.



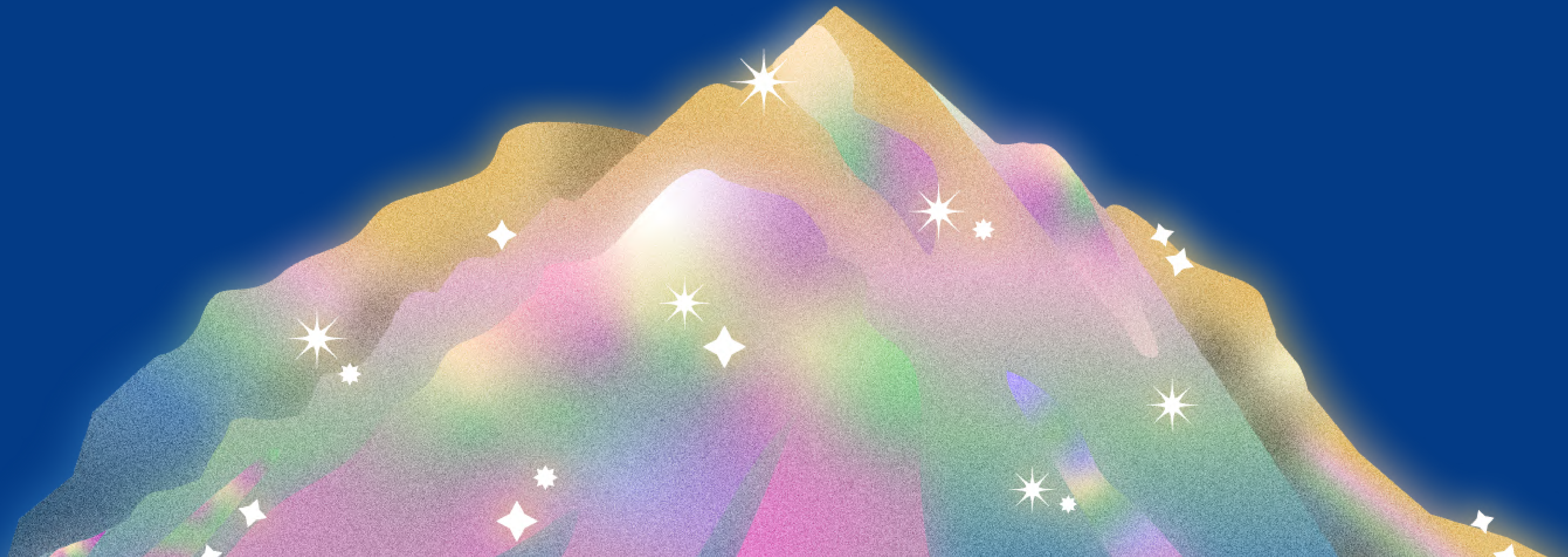
In our introductory discussions, we started by answering the question: what are we healing from? We wished to reflect on the structural and systemic, intimate and collective aspects of what healing means and the political essence of what we are healing from.

We framed healing as a collective and transformative act that looks at sources of trauma as rooted in societal structures. We discussed the need to heal from generational trauma and racial capitalism, as well as from dominant power dynamics in societal spaces.

The sources of trauma can be multiple, intersecting and diverse, encompassing both public as well as intimate aspects of everyone's experiences. Our insights reflected that the system, structures and dynamics that we are healing from are a source of collective trauma, distress and burnout. Therefore, specifically from an activist's perspective, healing is a political and collective act.

We also discussed the need to heal from and transform invisible work, unpaid labour and the pressure to be productive. Activist spaces can often lead us to burnout and loneliness and can be a source of trauma. We shared the need to transform this and co-create activist spaces that centre collective care and joy, and how this retreat was a key moment for this. We also connected this to the separating and isolating aspects of individualism, which is embedded in our capitalistic society; a separation not just between each other as activists but also from nature.

There was a strong need shared among us to be closer to and repair our relationship with nature, and to build the practice of viewing nature as something we are a part of, and not separate from.





# WHAT WE ARE HEALING FROM...



family dynamics

expectations assigned to our bodies

toxic relationships grief

rage identity

cultural oppression

binary structures

imposter syndrome

human greed

limitations

racial capitalism

loss

extractivism

forced

individualisation

societal pressures

unequal distribution of wealth

ego

abuse

superiority

sexual violence

capitalistic exploitation of our bodies

generational trauma

Western medicalisation

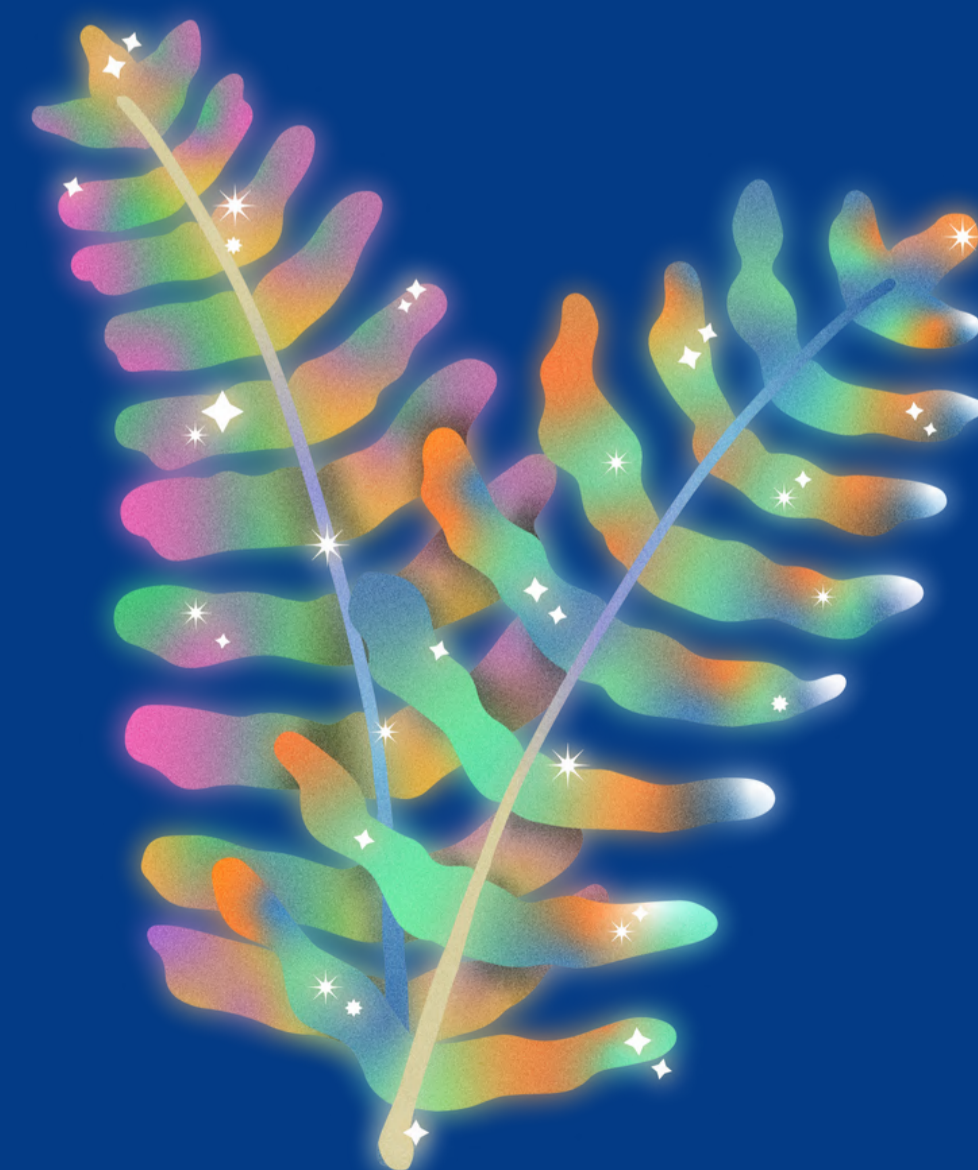
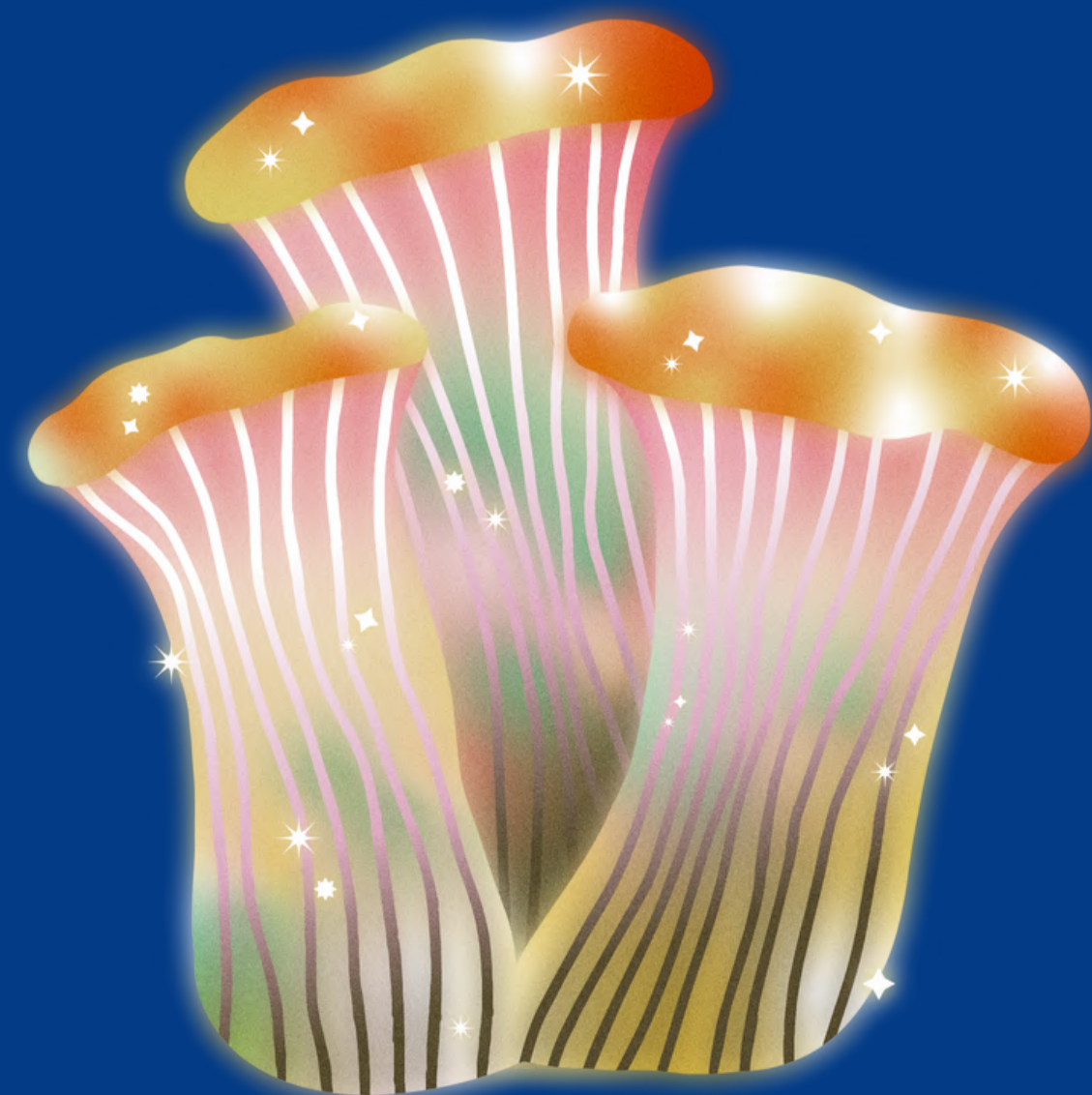
# FEMINIST HIKING

Towards the close of the retreat, we had significant discussions on the meaning and practice of feminist hiking. Many powerful reflections on feminist hiking practices emerged. Discussions on embodiment and overcoming fatphobia, capitalistic fitness and societal standards arose, and the significance of acknowledging this in a feminist hiking practice.

We all acknowledged that an element of feminist hiking involves addressing the different expectations that are put on our bodies as well as our positionalities and access to nature. We also discussed how feminist hiking needs to include not only gender but also racial and disability justice perspectives. Reaching the top of Monte Stivo together was a manifestation of feminist hiking.

We discussed that hiking and mountaineering can be very racialised, competitive, individualistic and not accessible. It was important for all of us to acknowledge our positionalities and experiences when it came to sharing our definition of hiking and healing with others, with the acknowledgement that we all heal and move differently. Reflecting on this was fundamental when different paces, rhythms and desire to hike in a certain way emerged.

It was key to acknowledge that when we are in a collective space, we can all contribute to the reproduction of structural dynamics depending on our positionality and lived experiences, so it becomes fundamental to unlearn, discuss, and transform this together. We also discussed guilt when it comes to being radically honest about our needs, and how guilt is a product of a society that seeks to separate us and make us feel alone.



We reflected on how feminist hiking can also be a space to challenge ourselves if that is desired, as well as finding a common rhythm and prioritising being together, and how embracing everyone's needs and desires should be accompanied by creating a collective space that goes beyond individual perspectives but that it is truly collective and co-created. Feminist hiking includes building a collective understanding of needs and desires and perceiving ourselves as collective beings that are part of a whole.

Once we reached the peak of Monte Stivo, we gave ourselves time to pause and reflect and then came together for a sharing circle on what we wish to let go of and leave behind on the mountain, in the soil, so that they can be transformed into collective power.





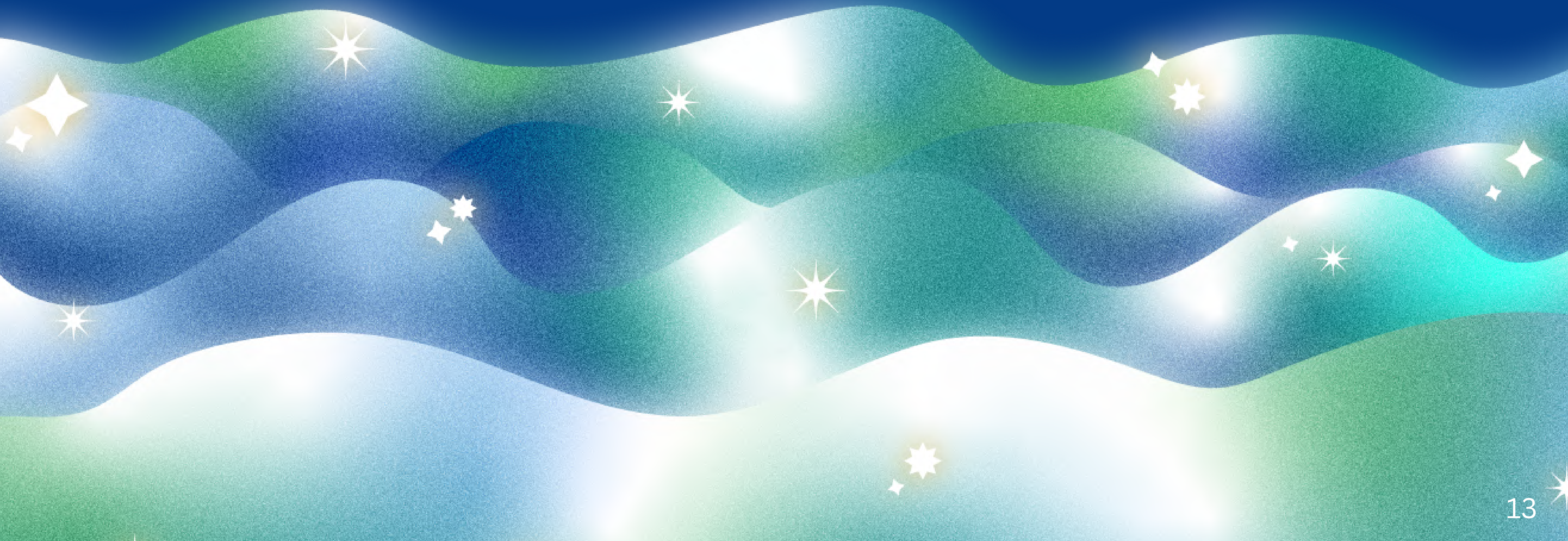
Our collective pot of things to let go of...

- not being enough
- ego expectations on relationships
- insecurities
- the need to be productive
- feeling unfree
- resentment to those who harmed us
- anger
- regrets
- fear of the unknown
- assumptions
- relationships that don't bring joy
- societal expectations
- fear

# POWER

Conversations around sources of power and different power structures are integral to discussions around collective healing for many reasons, particularly as the systemic structures that we are healing from result from dominant dynamics of power. Firstly, unpacking power dynamics within a group, within ourselves and in society is essential for addressing the root causes of trauma and oppression. By understanding power and power dynamics, we can recognise the systems and the intimate ways it is responsible for perpetuating harm on an individual and collective level. Additionally, discussions about power structures shed light on the need for collective responsibility and shared efforts in the healing process. They encourage collaboration and solidarity among us, highlighting the interdependence required for healing and transformation.

By examining our power in relation to others and self-reflecting on our power with others, we demonstrated interconnectedness with each other, we learnt that healing is not a solitary endeavour. A deep understanding of power highlights the importance of our relationships with each other more than anything, and our interconnectedness. Discussing our inner power helped us to express our vulnerability and analysing power dynamics with others also highlights the significance of vulnerability. Healing often involves sharing our experiences and emotions openly with each other, allowing us to form deep connections and understand our emotions intimately.



# CARE AND HEALING

During the retreat we shared insights for self care and healing mean to us, grounded in our wider framework of collective care and healing, and not viewing healing from an individualistic perspective. This is a regenerative and constant learning process.

By sharing these practices with each other, we support one another and encourage others to do the same, strengthening relationships and building a culture of empathy and resilience. Moreover, sharing such insights can help destigmatise discussions around our well-being and allow us to establish a collective healing space.



- \* having therapy sessions
- \* group exercise
- \* stretching and breathing
- \* grounding exercises
- \* cooking food and sharing
- \* getting a massage

- ... connecting with others physically and emotionally
- ... sex and pleasure
- ... having conversations with those close to me
- ... going for a run

... joyful movement, running and dancing

**BODY POSITIVITY**

**PATIENCE**

**SELF CARE IS...**

- ... togetherness
- ... art and creativity
- ... meditation
- ... cold showers
- ... movement
- ... a walk in a forest
- ... watching my favourite show
- ... sweating and challenging myself
- ... gardening
- ... reading books

laughing  
the joy of music

**SELF FORGIVENESS**

listening to my body

**SELF LOVE**

taking care of my skin

accepting and sitting with my feelings  
paying attention to my body and menstrual cycles

journalling

# COLLECTIVE CARE

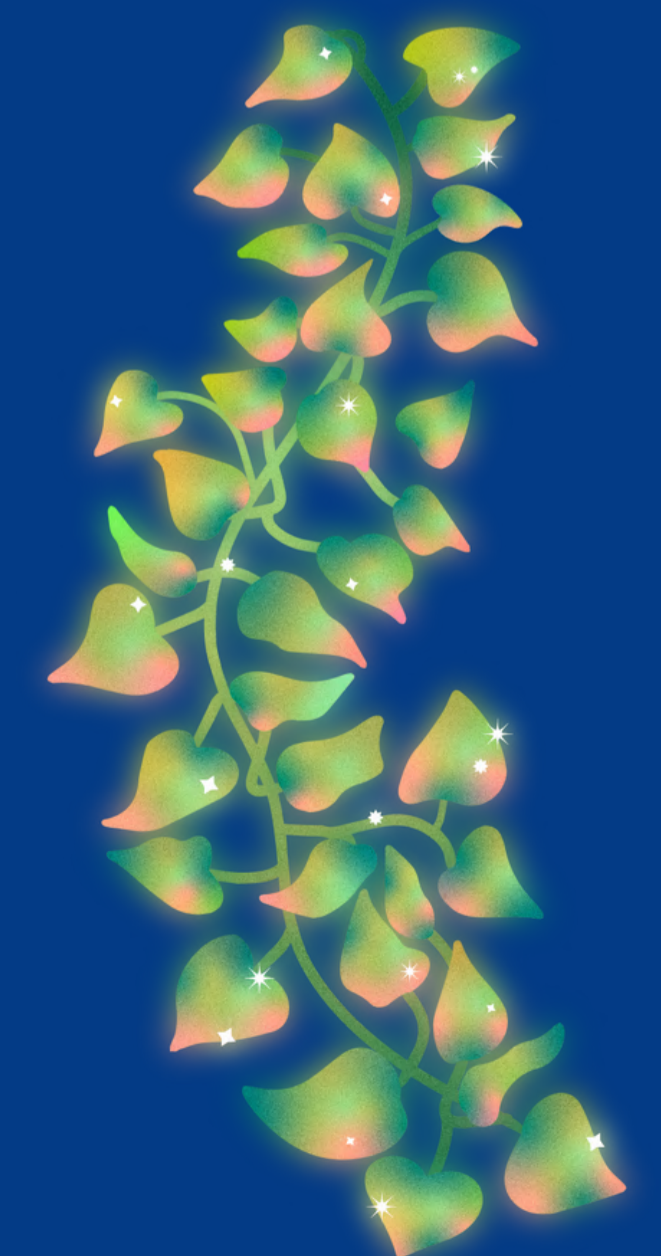
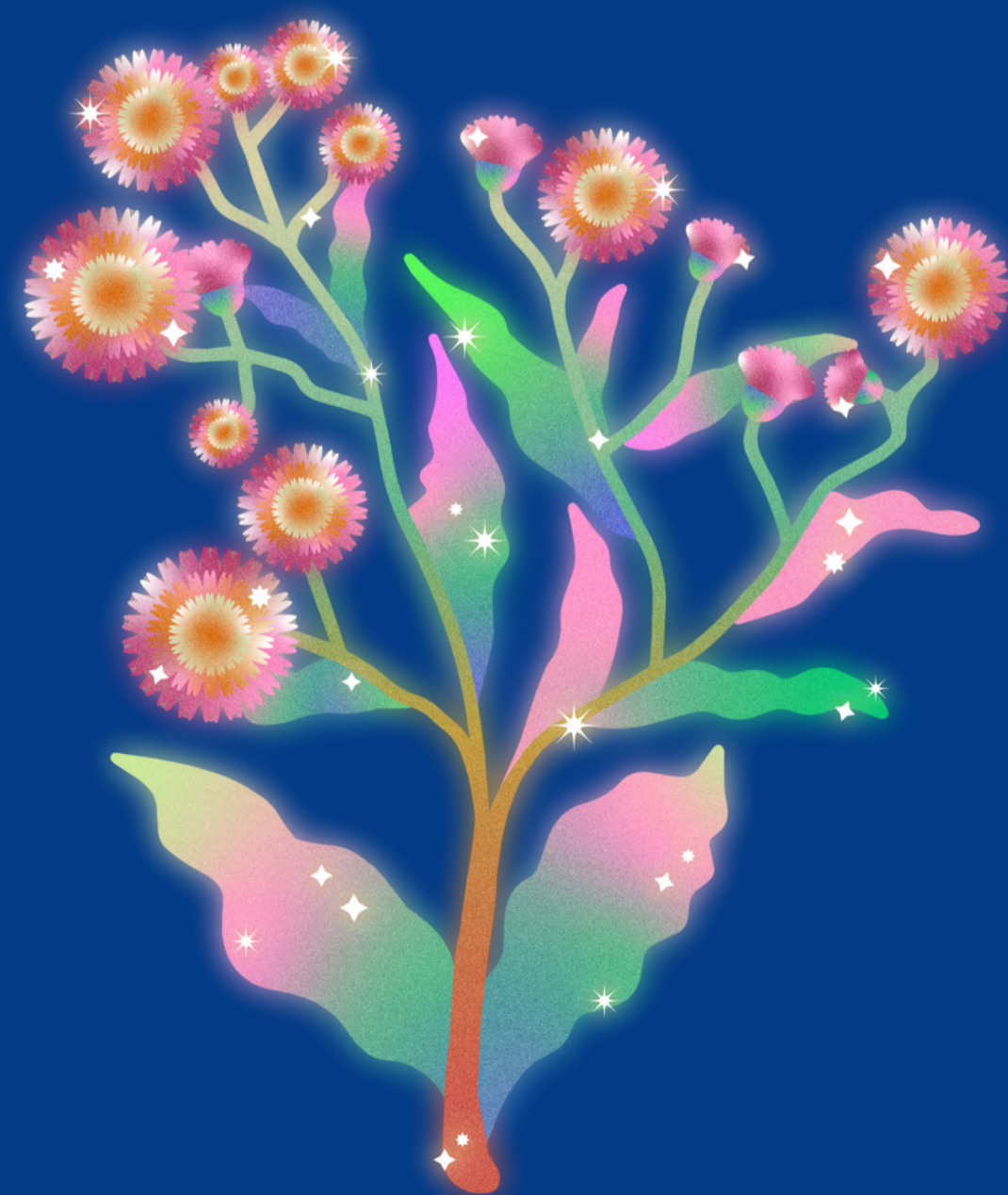
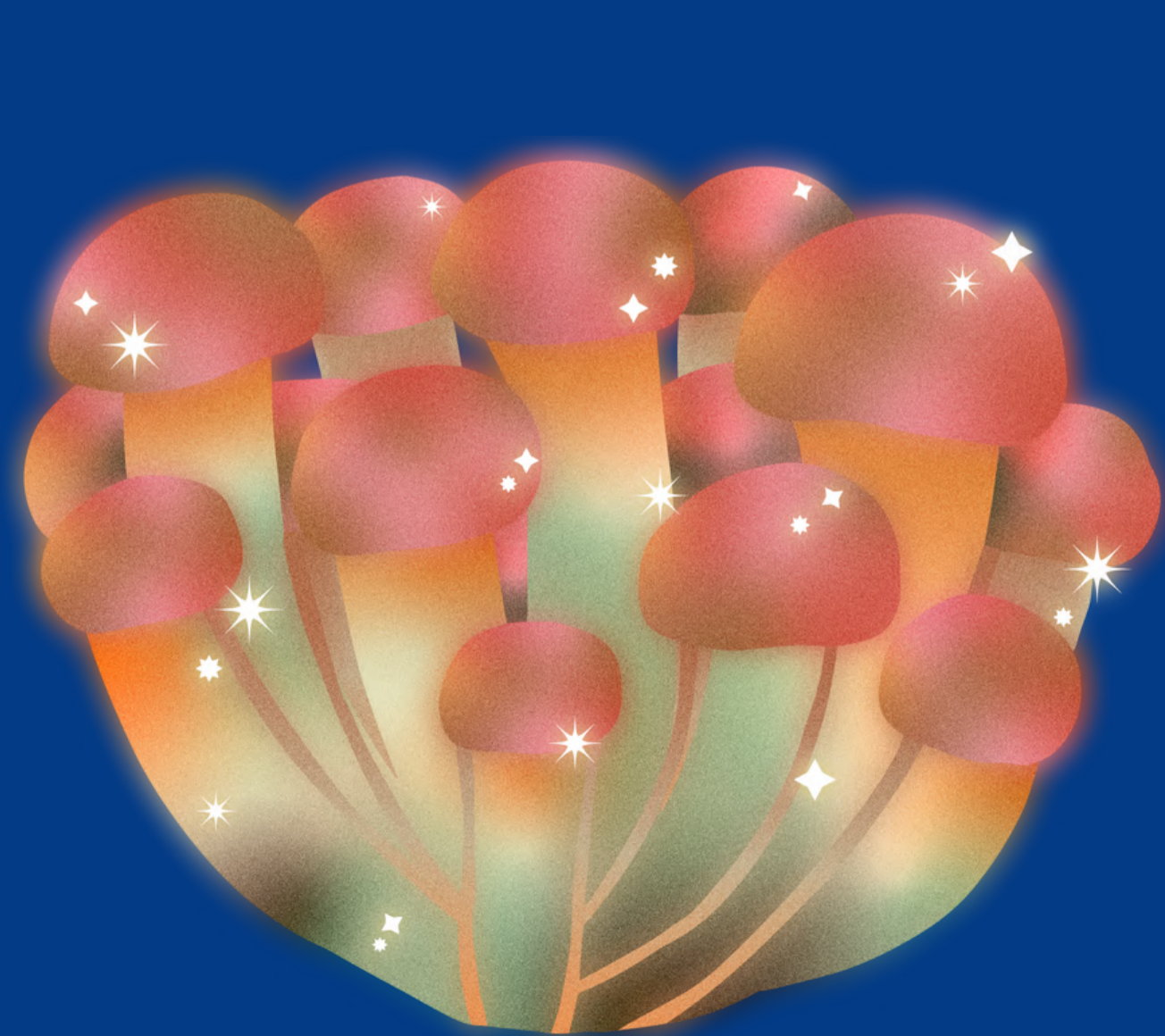
During our discussions on collective care, we shared various practices, particularly within workplaces and within our activist work. We discussed the importance of scheduled office closures which are done annually and after big projects to allow for times of rest, particularly during periods of burnout. This, as well as celebrating and recognising all the invisible and unpaid labour which are often an issue during big or long-term projects.

The theme of scarcity was shared in the dialogues, the issue of feminist work and collectives being underfunded and valued often leads to periods of burnout and our own collective and individual needs being neglected. We discussed strategies to overcome this during our workflow, such as creating a collective document at the start of each project with specific needs, wishes and expectations during the work timeline which anyone on the project can refer to, collective care manifestos as well as embedding collective leadership mechanisms and rotational leadership to support and care for each other more during our work.

At the intimate level, we discussed how it is essential to nurture active listening, balance expectations and pay close attention and understanding of other people's capacity to listen - as we cannot practice collective care if we are re-traumatising or offloading onto each other. Being able to deprioritise romantic relationships and find an abundance of love and care in different forms of relationships was also something that was a key collective care practice for us.

We continued these reflections by discussing how we need to make time and space to unlearn and let go of productivity dynamics and embrace that intersectional organising is slow and organic and that we must embrace this process with humility and care for each other.

We closed these discussions with an understanding that care is a collective act and it is essential element of feminist hiking.







Feminist Hiking Collective



Rock  
a  
Bivy

Columbia



# CLOSING REMARKS

*I feel encouraged to bring all these learnings into daily life.*

*I feel rejuvenated, re-inspired, emotional, connected, motivated - myself again.*

*I feel re-energised in many different ways. Amazing both in the body and the soul.*

*I feel incredibly loved and seen as an activist but also as a person! I cherish the memories and the bonds that I have made throughout the retreat very deeply.*

*The valley we stayed in was magical, and we got to connect with it through the food they produced there and the landscapes we hiked were simply incredible.*

Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat Participants

*Our forever gratitude. To the soil that welcomed our steps. To the mountains that embraced our presence and sustained our joy and resilience. To the forest that grounded our essence in belonging and rootedness. To the territory and its communities for welcoming and embracing our collective presence. To the ancestral knowledge and wisdom of indigenous groups and movements across geographies have allowed us to unlearn and understand the fundamentality of not extracting but weaving together. To the retreat participants for coming with an open heart, for the love, and for sowing the seeds for collective healing. To the Hotel Martinelli team for making us feel at home and nurturing us with locally grown organic food. To Urgent Action Fund for resourcing and making this possible. To the earth as we acknowledge and embody the wisdom that when we do not feel strong, we can let the earth be strong for us. Because we are all interconnected because we belong.*

Feminist Hiking Collective