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Literary GOF Finalist

ARTISTIC RESPONSE [EXCERPT]

"Poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father."

This "artistic response" is based on my first of two trips to post-war Bosnia in 1997 and 1998, where I worked with Muslim refugee women, displaced people not yet back in their homes. Women of all professions, they had lost almost everything, and many, including the elderly, had endured or witnessed rape. On the first trip, I worked with two other American women (the second time I went alone), offering two four-hour workshops every day for some weeks toward the women's healing in the midst of such trauma and loss. We met in a hotel that had been a rape center during the war—a place of grim, ugly energy; but the warmth of our women gathering every day and of the painful, careful work they did together, somehow began to heal and transform the energy in that space.

Munira

The whole first week she didn't smile, not once. Not that there is a great deal to smile about in these women's lives, but in the workshops we found things to make us laugh out loud, or smile—if only from the eyes. Not Munira. She would come limping in to the workshops each day, take off her worn old coat slowly and carefully as if handling a delicate treasure, something that could be lost and never found again, and hang it on a rack. If it was raining, which it almost always was that cold November, she'd lean her umbrella against the wall and give it a little pat, as if to say, "Don't worry, I'll come back to fetch you. I won't leave you here alone."

The other women would be milling around and chatting and smoking; after the second day they'd begun to relax with each other and with us—telling jokes, asking questions. Not Munira. She would take a chair in the circle long before the others, and sit with her stiff old hands in her lap, her blue eyes cool and impenetrable. Wounded. Not so much like a dog that's been kicked too much as like a bird with a broken wing. Her curly grey hair was thinning, her sweet wrinkled face pale, and I began to notice that sometimes she would slide a hand into her pocket, and bring out a wadded ball of tiny bits of papers. Smoothing them out, she'd gaze at them, reading, then wad them up and put them back.

She "participated" in her way. She sat in all the small group discussions. She did the exercises with the others. She listened to everything we said and nodded from time to time in agreement. But day to day she said nothing, remaining slightly removed from us, detached, as if the thin string beginning to bind us had not quite reached to her. And when she would return again each day, I was surprised.

WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS HAVE YOU ALREADY TAKEN IN THE PURSUIT OF YOUR ART?

DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR GOAL OR PROJECT WHICH YOU ARE PURSUING IN YOUR ART AT THE PRESENT MOMENT?

**DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR GOAL OR PROJECT WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO PURSUE AS AN AROHO GIFT OF FREEDOM RECIPIENT?
WHAT SPECIFICALLY WOULD YOU REQUEST FROM AROHO TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE THIS GOAL OR PROJECT? [EXCERPT]**

I am applying for this wondrous grant because I'm at a turning point in my work, and all the pieces that have gone before are now reshaping themselves into new ideas and possibilities I wish with all my heart to pursue.

I plan to stop performing and spend more time writing; the monologues I write now would be for other performers (mostly women, but probably now for men as well). My dream is to nurture a network of many solo performers who—all over the country, maybe ultimately abroad as well—would perform monologues of the voices who challenge us in this complex time to reflect on who we really are and where we're going.
