

MIND YOUR MIND

Portraits and stories about what goes on in our heads

**MENTAL HEALTH
ART TOUR**

POWERED BY CONNECTING CHAPTER

STICHTING
CONNECTING CHAPTER

MENTAL HEALTH ART TOUR

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Mind Your Mind

Portraits and stories about what goes on in our heads

Portraits Brendan de Clercq. Art Peter Donkersloot, Colette van Ojik and Irene Hoff.
Interviews Tamara Swart. Text and editing Remke Westerhof.

FOREWORD

Art inspires and talking helps.

Behind every person there is a story. In this book, people you may know from the stage, the screen or the dance floor talk about what goes on in their heads: pressure, loss, fear, addiction, and the way back. Artists created work to go with their stories. Brendan de Clercq photographed them, without embellishment.

The Mental Health Art Tour began in late 2023 as a travelling exhibition in places where people already are: libraries, schools, festivals, organisations. In 2025, more than 114,000 people saw the Tour in five branches of the Amsterdam Public Library alone. This book is a selection of those stories, to keep.

Why Mind Your Mind? Because we believe mental health deserves just as much attention as physical health. For a broken leg, we get help. For what goes on in our heads, we often don't.

With this book you support Stichting Connecting Chapter and new projects that improve young people's mental health.

Tamara Swart
founder of the Mental Health Art Tour

Seven stories.

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**ART TAKES YOU
OUT OF YOUR HEAD
FOR A WHILE.**



FORTY-FIVE MINUTES OF DRAWING, CLAY OR PAINTING. THAT IS ALL IT TAKES.

In an American study, 39 adults spent forty-five minutes making something with clay, markers or paper. In three quarters of them, the stress hormone cortisol had dropped afterwards. Whether they had any experience with drawing or painting made no difference.

Looking helps too. Standing in front of a portrait, for a moment your mind is on someone else's thoughts instead of your own. That is often where the conversation begins. That is how the Mental Health Art Tour works: first look, then talk.



01

Armin van Buuren

From success to inner calm and mental strength

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**KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. TALKING HELPS.
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT YOU DON'T
KEEP STRUGGLING WITH IT ON YOUR OWN.**

THE STRUGGLE WITH THE 'MONKEY MIND'

Armin van Buuren has been at the top of the dance scene for decades. Thousands of fans cheer him on at his shows, but behind the scenes a very different battle is being fought. "For me, mental health is how I deal with the 'Monkey Mind', that inner voice that keeps me awake at night and tells me what I still have to do or what I didn't do well enough," says Armin.

That inner restlessness is something he struggled with for a long time. "Five years ago I started seriously working on myself, I went into therapy and I created a 'baseline'. A foundation I can always fall back on, so I don't need anything to numb myself."

A NEW WAY OF COPING

For years Armin used alcohol to take the edge off. "I used to need two glasses of champagne before I went on stage. Now I do a breathing exercise and tell myself: 'I'm okay, whatever happens.' That has completely changed the way I deal with stress."

Since he stopped drinking, he feels better than ever. "In March it will be five years since I stopped. It has brought me nothing but good: I sleep better, I've lost weight, and I feel stronger, physically and mentally."

THE GAP BETWEEN THE STAGE AND LONELINESS

One of the biggest challenges in a DJ's life is the contrast between the stage and the loneliness that follows. "You stand in front of tens of thousands of people, full of adrenaline, and an hour later you're sitting in a quiet hotel room. Mentally, that is tough."

During the pandemic Armin realised how important connection is. "After Avicii's death I felt that as DJs we needed to talk to each other more about mental health. So during Covid I started a group chat and Zoom sessions with colleagues. It turned out we were all struggling with the same things."

THE POWER OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Armin believes a healthy mind lives in a healthy body. "It sounds like a cliché, but it's true. Sleeping well, eating healthily, drinking plenty of water and exercising really make a difference to how you feel mentally."

Meditation has become a fixed part of his routine too. "I've now meditated for over a thousand days in a row. It helps me quiet my thoughts and stay close to myself."

FROM SHAME TO SELF-LOVE

One of the biggest lessons Armin learned is to accept himself. "I was a people pleaser, I wanted everyone to like me. But in doing so I lost myself. Since I've dared to be vulnerable, life has become a lot more enjoyable."

He gives an example: "I have had three hair transplants. I used to hide that, but recently I simply took my cap off on my radio show and said: 'This is me.' That feels uncomfortable, but it is also liberating. Shame is dangerous. It can destroy you if you don't dare to be open about it."

A MESSAGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

For young people struggling with their mental health, Armin has a clear message:

"Know that you are not alone. Talking helps. Everyone has moments when they feel bad, but the most important thing is that you don't keep struggling with it on your own. Seek support from friends, family or professionals. There is always a way forward."

Armin quotes an inspiring line that has helped him:

"The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."

In other words: the things you are afraid of often hold the greatest lessons and the most growth.

With his openness about mental health, Armin hopes to inspire others to find their own inner calm. "It's a process, not a final goal. But by taking good care of yourself, mentally and physically, you stand stronger in life."

**THE CAVE YOU FEAR
TO ENTER HOLDS THE
TREASURE YOU SEEK.**

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Armin van Buuren's favourite quote.



02

Merlijn and Vlinder Kamerling

You don't have to be broken before you're allowed to talk

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**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE BROKEN BEFORE YOU'RE
ALLOWED TO TALK.**

Merlijn (1998) and Vlinder (2005) Kamerling are the children of Antonie Kamerling and Isa Hoes. Merlijn is a writer and entrepreneur, Vlinder an entrepreneur and student. Together they started the lifestyle brand Limitless, with an important message: more attention for mental health, and making it something you can talk about. Their father died when they were still children.

TRAINING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Merlijn: For me, mental health is everything. For a long time I was mainly focused on my body; I trained to get stronger. But at some point I only looked in the mirror to see if my muscles were growing. And it was precisely through that training that I found out: my head needs it at least as much. The older I get, the more I see that one doesn't work without the other. You have to train your mental health just as much as your body, in a way that works for you.

Vlinder: I'm still young, but I also try to work on my mental health consciously. I find it interesting to see how you can improve it in different ways.

GETTING A GRIP

Vlinder: When my head gets too full, I go and do something. Tidying up, drawing, crafting, something with my hands. That helps to calm my thoughts. When I tidy up, it also feels as if I get a bit of a grip again. As if I'm tidying my head by tidying my surroundings.

Merlijn: For me that is exercise. When I train, I literally sweat my thoughts loose. At first I thought I was doing it for my body. But in the end it turned out I was doing it for my head.

FIRST YEAR OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

Merlijn: Two weeks before I started secondary school, our father died. I was eleven years old and my whole life changed. Gaming meant I didn't have to feel what was going on. Later I escaped into smoking weed, drinking, going out. That lasted eight years.

Vlinder: I was five. I had no words for my grief. But I drew and crafted a lot, I was always busy with my hands. Looking back I think: that was my way of letting something out, without being aware of it.

FEELING

Merlijn: I only learned much later that you are allowed to do something with that feeling. You don't have to wait until things go wrong. You don't have to go straight to a

psychologist either. Sometimes it's enough to say to someone: 'I'm not feeling great right now.'

Vlinder: So you don't have to wait until it's 'bad enough'. You don't have to be broken before you're allowed to talk. Your feeling is simply there, and that's okay.

BOOK

Merlijn: Writing was a turning point in my life. It started when we were on holiday as a family and I couldn't sleep for nights on end. I started writing down my thoughts, and that let me look at them differently. The chaos in my head grew calmer. Once the words are on paper, you can share them with the people around you. I went to my mother and we talked about it. That was a relief. In the end I wrote a book about my father.

DAD

Vlinder: Our father was manic-depressive, and because of that he took his own life. So at a young age we had to deal with a great loss. And even when you're small, you process it without realising. Maybe because of that you have to make a bit more effort later on to process everything properly. But actually everyone has to do that. Even if what you go through is smaller. Your mental health always needs attention.

Merlijn: Precisely because it went so wrong with Dad, I know now: I want to do this differently. And I want others to know that they don't have to wait until things go wrong.

INTUITION

Merlijn: At a young age I was inspired by the quote from Muhammad Ali: "I know where I'm going and I know the truth. I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want." I put this quote in my book because I knew: this is about me. From a young age you are steered in a certain direction by school, your surroundings and the expectations of others. But what if you want to find your own direction? It's important to train your feeling and your intuition. That is your safe place inside, the one you can always fall back on. When I was young I pushed my feelings away and got stuck. That's why I say now: try to train your intuition and learn to trust it.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Merlijn: For a long time I thought I was the only one who felt this way. But as soon as you share something, you notice that nobody has everything perfectly under control. Everyone is struggling with something.

Vlinder: We are all searching a bit. Saying that out loud makes it lighter. I also hope young people see that being creative is mental care too. It doesn't have to be big. Making something, tidying something, going for a walk, that helps.

Merlijn: You don't need an end goal. If you do something today that makes you feel a little better, you're already doing fine.



03

Simon Keizer

From the outside in

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YOU ARE NOT WHAT YOU THINK.

Simon Keizer is a singer and presenter. With Nick Schilder he formed the successful musical duo Nick & Simon. With his solo show 'Ruimte' (Space), Simon is touring theatres across the Netherlands this year.

BEING PRESENT

To me, being mentally healthy means not getting lost in my thoughts. Thoughts are just thoughts: you are not what you think. Worries are usually about yesterday or tomorrow, while we only ever live now. Balance, for me, is being in the now as much as possible, without losing yourself in the noise in your head.

LOSS AND NUMBNESS

My father died when I was fifteen. A year later came the New Year's fire in Volendam, in which fourteen people lost their lives. I survived, but the events came so fast, one after the other, that I developed a mechanism for not feeling. It was too much. Only years later did I realise how emotionally stunted I had become as a result. I had to learn to feel again. That process, painful, confronting but also liberating, led to great insights. It has been a rollercoaster, but one I would not have wanted to miss.

MUSIC AS A LANGUAGE

I wrote my very first song, Still Searching, when I was sixteen. It was about losing my father. It was almost inevitable that music would become my outlet. Music gave me a language to speak where words fell short. It gave me something to hold on to, and meaning, at a time when I might otherwise have come to a complete standstill.

MORNING RITUAL

In recent years I've developed a habit: getting up early, often as early as half past five. Before the children wake up, I take time to journal, meditate or read. I call it grounding. That early calm stops me from landing straight in a spin of thoughts. It's a simple routine, but it gives me a solid foundation to start the day in balance.

TURNING POINT

An important turning point was the birth of my daughter, eight years ago. Instead of being overwhelmed by love I felt... almost nothing. That was unsettling. For months I didn't dare share this, until I finally told my wife. Later I realised that through trauma I had learned not to feel, and so I experienced the beautiful things less intensely too. That realisation set me on a new path: turning inward, facing what hurt, and slowly clearing it out.

Fatherhood became a catalyst for healing. Not in the sense that you are ever 'done', I believe nobody is fully healed. But I discovered that vulnerability can also be a strength. These days I sometimes feel almost too much, and I experience that as a richness.

FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

Openness is often described as bringing something from the inside out. For me it's the other way round: I had to go from the outside in. Instead of blaming the world or circumstances, I learned to take responsibility for my own perception. My father's death, the fire: I could keep seeing those events as tragic and limiting. But I could also see them as proof that I survived, that I have resilience. The facts stay the same, but the meaning you give them changes everything.

A CHOICE, EVERY DAY

Every day is a choice again. Do I choose frustration or gratitude? Grumpiness at being woken too early by my children, or delight in their giggling at dawn? It's the same with the artwork, and with life itself. What you see depends on the glasses you look through.

SILENCE AND SPEAKING

After the fire there was a lot of talk for a year. The whole village was affected. Then silence fell: as if people felt enough had been said. But that closedness didn't help the healing process. Only much later, during my theatre tour, did I talk about it in more depth. The reactions were intense and heartwarming at the same time. People recognised themselves, felt supported. That confirmed it for me once again: when one person dares to speak, it opens the door for another. Your healing is my healing.

INSPIRATION

I find a lot of inspiration in others who show their resilience. Recently I listened to a Jay Shetty podcast with Novak Djokovic. A man who, despite war, trauma and setbacks, has consciously built his life around health, discipline and self-care. His story confirms for me that mental and physical strength go hand in hand.

WORDS FOR ANYONE HAVING A HARD TIME

To someone who is going through a deep low I would like to say: don't believe everything you think. Your thoughts are not facts, they are stories your head makes up. You can learn to look at them, to observe them without identifying with them. Sometimes it even helps to smile at them. The slim book Don't Believe Everything You

Think by Joseph Nguyen has given me a lot here. Simple words, but with great impact.

ART

This week I had gone to bed far too late, knowing that the children start the day again at seven. And at seven sharp they started calling. But I wanted to turn over for a bit longer. My wife chose to say: isn't that a lovely sound, that giggling. So what do you choose? Are you grumpy because they wake you up, or do you choose to think how wonderful it is to start the day like this? Because the situation doesn't change. The same applies to art. Everyone sees the same painting or artwork. But everyone can create their own feeling about it. Do you see the beauty, or do you go looking for the flaw that will annoy you? The artwork is simply the metaphor for every situation in life. What do you choose?

HAPPINESS AND EMPTINESS

I have experienced the successes of number one hits and full stadiums. But happiness doesn't lie there. Had I not experienced them, I might have kept searching for them forever. That emptiness, the top athlete sitting alone in his hotel room after a big win, I recognise it. The realisation that real happiness comes from within, not from outside, is perhaps the most important lesson I have learned.



04

Immanuelle Grives

When I grow up, I'll show everyone what I'm worth

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**WHEN YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING, ASK
SOMEONE IN YOUR NETWORK. PEOPLE LOVE TO
HELP.**

Imanuelle Grives (40) is an actress, presenter, writer and social worker. She plays roles in theatre, film and television and wrote the autobiographical book 'Vechtershart' (Fighter's Heart). She has also taken part in programmes such as Wie is de Mol? and Special Forces VIPS.

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

A year ago I found out I have ADHD, and a lot of puzzle pieces fell into place. Before that I had often searched for where some of my behaviour came from, behaviour I couldn't quite explain. Why do I like to seek out tension? How is it that I can chew on a remark for days or weeks, when I'm not insecure at all? Now I know: my brain simply works differently. I have learned that when I start overthinking, I 'thank' my brain for the information but just don't go along with it. That may sound a little strange, but it works for me.

NETWORK

Because of my ADHD diagnosis I have learned to delegate. That way I get more done. I have a personal assistant who does my admin, and I work closely with someone else. We don't pay each other, but we complement each other perfectly. She is autistic, I have ADHD. She is all about structure, I am very much not, but we help each other. That is also my tip: when you're looking for something, ask someone in your network. People love to help.

TOMORROWLAND

In 2019 I was at the top of my game. Things were going my way and I had a lot of work. But inside I felt incapable, as if I didn't deserve where I was at that moment. I felt like an impostor, as if everyone would find out any moment that I wasn't good enough. That feeling created an intense dynamic and destructive behaviour. I had panic attacks, blackouts and was fighting hard with my head and my feelings. In the end, at the Tomorrowland festival, I hit a wall, literally and figuratively. I was in a terrible state and thought: do or die. At the festival I was arrested with a large quantity of drugs. Suddenly I was at the centre of the biggest media scandal of the year.

STRUCTURE

After that I spent two months in prison in Antwerp. Strangely enough, that brought me peace too. I was running at such a pace that in the end it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was so overstimulated, and then suddenly there was a lot of structure. I didn't have to think about food, about work,

about answering messages. I had a daily rhythm, exercised and could think a lot about myself. When I came back into society it was hard to keep that structure. Especially with my work, where one moment you have jobs back to back and then a day off. Then I would make a list of what I had to do, but by the end of the day I hadn't got through it. That frustrated me.

GETTING UP

After I got into such trouble in 2019, and everything that led up to it, I discovered that a great many people were behind me. But also that a great many people looked up to me. It hurt me a lot that I had disappointed so many people by being occupied only with my own pain and not with them. I said to myself: I have to show them that even though I fell flat on my face, you can come back. I thought: if I am honest and tell what is really going on, my story can be one that inspires. I want them to know that you really can change your behaviour. By saying sorry, by listening, by being sincere and taking responsibility for your actions.

HELICOPTER VIEW

My message to young people who are in trouble or going through a hard time is: you are not alone. Look in your network for someone you trust, whether that's friends, uncles or aunts or a professional. You have your own responsibility to build a good network around you. Someone you feel comfortable talking to. So that you can put things in perspective. Don't keep your conversations superficial, but dare to tackle the difficult subjects too.

NATURE

Just before things went wrong in 2019, I called my mother and said: I want to go to the interior of Suriname. The energy there is completely different. You hear the river in the distance, the animals, the wind, it's warm. It makes you so calm. I wanted to be in nature. Back to basics. That will help me, back to myself. I have the feeling that surroundings have so much more influence on us than we realise. The hardness of the stone, the buildings, I think that makes us harder too, and busy, busy, busy. Nature is a good place to clear your head.

**IF I DON'T HAVE RED, I
USE BLUE.**

PABLO PICASSO



05

Kim Feenstra

My child doesn't have to carry my baggage

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**HEALING IS NOT AN END POINT. IT IS A CHOICE YOU
MAKE AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

Kim Feenstra (1985) is an actress, model and photographer. She won Holland's Next Topmodel and took part in the programme 'Het Perfecte Plaatje'. Kim is open about her difficult childhood and campaigns against passing on intergenerational trauma: 'My child doesn't have to carry my baggage.'

THE ANNUAL CHECK-UP

Many people think you're done once you've processed your traumas. But in fact that's when it begins. When you understand where your patterns come from, the search for who you really are starts. Then you have to face yourself, not just with a kind eye, but in the mirror precisely when it hurts. I believe that everyone, whatever their past, should go to therapy at least once or twice a year. Not because something is wrong with you, but because it is an investment in yourself, just like going to the gym or taking your car in for its annual service.

HEALING

I have tried almost everything myself: from systemic therapy, family constellations and EMDR to equine coaching. Equine coaching turned out to be the most confronting and the most healing for me. One session showed me more than I had dared to feel in years. By now I know: healing takes time. So does awareness. You always carry scars with you, but you can learn to live without them determining how you love, work, feel or choose. That's why I still talk to a coach. I keep working on myself, my patterns, my baggage. Healing is not an end point. It is a choice you make again and again.

SURVIVAL

Everything I have been through in my life has shaped me. My childhood, the chaos at home, the absence of stability, my mother's own searching, her heroin addiction: it made my world uncertain. My mother never had a safe childhood, and neither did my grandmother. Generational pain repeats itself as long as nobody stops to face it. If you don't deal with that pain, it comes back like a boomerang: in depression, burnout, stress, anxiety. For years I lived in survival mode. I didn't miss anyone because I couldn't feel it. Not feeling was safer than feeling. Survival became my strength, but it was no life.

MOTHERHOOD

The real change came when I became a mother. Not because of the label 'mother' but because of what my son let me experience: love without fear. Softness without conditions. He heals my inner child by letting me play, feel, be patient and trust. Children are mirrors. They show you where you are still stuck, where you freeze,

where you learn. It was only during my pregnancy that I understood how much of my childhood was not normal. I had thought it was normal because I didn't know any better. My mother repeated what she knew, just like her mother. But I decided: it stops with me. My child doesn't have to carry my baggage. I work. I process. I confront. I change. For him, but also for myself.

MIRROR

Your trauma must never become an excuse to hurt others. Your responsibility begins with yourself. When you are damaged, you often attract people who feed that damage. It feels familiar because it resembles what you know. But familiar is not the same as safe. It can make relationships and friendships stifling, toxic and destructive. That's why I think everyone should work on themselves before starting a new relationship, and certainly before having children.

STABILITY

I never learned how to handle money. When I started earning young, I spent it faster than it came in. Without knowledge, without boundaries, without guidance. As a result I ended up again in situations that looked painfully like my mother's. I repeated patterns that were not mine. Only when I understood that financial stability and mental stability go hand in hand was I able to break the pattern. This is something we can teach each other: earlier, more honestly and without shame.

FUTURE

I draw strength from therapy but also from exercise, from my faith and from living consciously. Exercise helps me clear my head; my faith gives me direction and a sense of trust. But real healing is to keep talking. Exploring your shadows. Recognising old patterns. Now and then taking a hard look at yourself. And still going on. One day you feel the difference: your baggage is lighter. Your future wider open.

'CHASING'

I have a lot of trust in the path I'm now following. I always think: if it isn't meant to be and something is withheld from you, there's a reason for it. If, for example, something I would really like doesn't work out, a certain job, a friendship or a relationship, then it wasn't meant for you. I don't chase it either, because I believe there is something else that is better for you, that suits you better, that is healthier for you.

FREEDOM

If you are reading this and you struggle with trauma, old pain or patterns that no longer serve you, then this is your sign. You are not reading this by chance. Healing is hard. Sometimes it feels as if you have to carry three generations. But with you it can stop. You can change. You can create freedom, for yourself and for everyone after you. It is not a burden. It is an opportunity. The best investment you will ever make is in yourself.



06

Guido Weijers

Happiness is not a destination

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I AM NOT MY THOUGHTS; I HAVE THOUGHTS.

Guido Weijers (1977) is a comedian and theatre maker. He is known for his sharp observations, humour and his open way of talking about happiness, mental health and life itself. In his work and conversations he explores what it means to be human, with everything that comes with it: doubt, pain, pleasure and meaning.

DISCOMFORT

We live in a time when spirituality is sometimes confused with detachment. As if you're only 'enlightened' once nothing touches you anymore. I don't believe in the idea that we always have to 'rise above everything', that we have to put everything in perspective and are no longer allowed to feel anything. Feeling is precisely what makes life alive. The uncomfortable things too. Shame, sadness, anger, doubt, they are part of it. And to be frank: I'm glad I can feel them. It's a good thing to feel a bit of embarrassment in the supermarket when your child plays up. In life it's simply useful for things to get to you sometimes. That doesn't make me less aware, it makes me human. That doesn't make life weaker, it makes it richer.

BRAIN

Some people whose heads are always switched on, always full, say: I'd like to think like a normal person for a day. To me that sounds like the worst thing imaginable. And what is 'normal' anyway? My brain thinks the way it thinks, and I embrace that. In fact, I benefit from it. Because on stage I talk about how I look at things, not about how everyone looks at them, otherwise everyone would be on that stage. So I'm glad my brain sometimes goes completely its own way.

THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

I have learned to take my thoughts less seriously. Thoughts are ideas, not truths. That insight has helped me enormously. Sometimes a dark or bizarre thought shoots through my head, just like everyone else's. But the real problem only arises when you resist it and think: I'm not allowed to think this. Then you make the thought bigger than it is. While often it's just your brain making connections, scanning for risks or warning you. I am not my thoughts; I have thoughts. That difference is everything.

LOUSY DAY

My way of dealing with setbacks may be simple, but it's honest: have them. If today is lousy, make it a lousy day. Cry, feel it, make a cup of tea, make it a comfortable lousy day. But don't stay stuck in it. Set a date, literally, on which you decide: from here I move forward again.

Because if you only keep looking at the past, you have your back to the future. A better past is no longer on offer. A better future might be.

HAPPINESS

Everyone wants to be happy. But what is happiness? For me it consists of three things. Short-term happiness is enjoyment, taking pleasure in the small things that make you glad. Long-term happiness is having your life in order: calm and stability. And then there is meaning, by simply being a bit kind to other people. If one of those three gets out of balance, you feel it immediately. Then you can adjust by having an ice cream a bit more often, doing your admin or paying someone a compliment. And we act as if happiness is the highest goal, but that's a misconception. Life is also simply made up of headwinds.

COMPARING

We compare ourselves too much with others, especially online. We only see success, wealth and perfection. But that picture is false. If you're going to compare yourself anyway, compare yourself to who you were yesterday. And perhaps even more important: don't live by other people's expectations. Much of the pressure we feel we put on ourselves. Ask yourself more often: what do I actually want? What makes me calm or happy?

ASKING FOR HELP

I once asked an audience: 'Who likes helping other people?' Everyone raised their hand. Then I asked: 'Who likes asking for help?' Nobody raised a hand. I found that so striking, because people love to help. And when you share a problem, you do other people a favour. They feel they can do something for someone else. And you benefit yourself, because you might get some good advice. It works both ways. Asking for help is not weakness, it is working together.

SNUF

I have a friend who often talks about his dog Snuf. When he comes home, Snuf is always happy. Always: wagging, enthusiastic, without judgement. And do you know who gets cuddled the most in that house? Exactly: Snuf. It's actually very simple: what you give, you get back. If you are friendly, open, warm, people want to be around you. It's not rocket science. It's just human.



07

Mohamedou Ould Slahi

Forgiveness is not for the other person, but for yourself

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AS LONG AS WE STAY SILENT, IT GROWS.

Mohamedou Ould Slahi was born in Mauritania and spent fourteen years in the notorious Guantánamo Bay prison without ever being formally charged. While still imprisoned, he published his harrowing memoir 'Guantánamo Diary' in 2015. In 2016 Ould Slahi was released and returned to Mauritania. His life story became the basis for the film *The Mauritanian*.

A CHILDHOOD IN MAURITANIA

Mohamedou Ould Slahi was born in Mauritania as the ninth of twelve children. He grew up in a large, close family in the capital Nouakchott. "My father died young. My mother was an exceptionally strong woman. I remember her with prayer beads in her hand, hoping for better times. She was my anchor." At a young age he won a scholarship to study electrical engineering in Germany. It was the start of a life that offered him new horizons, but would also bring him face to face with great injustice.

FROM FREEDOM TO CAPTIVITY

In the early nineties Mohamedou travelled to Afghanistan to fight against the Russian occupiers, with a group that would later become known as Al Qaeda. He had connections with people around Osama bin Laden, including his cousin. Those ties eventually led to his arrest and imprisonment in the notorious Guantánamo Bay prison.

In 2001 Mohamedou was arrested without charge. He was falsely accused of involvement in the 9/11 attacks. He was tortured, deprived of sleep, and locked up for years without any evidence. "They took everything from me, even my identity." The most traumatic moment came when Mohamedou, in captivity, surrounded by walls and guards, heard that his mother had died. That he never saw her again, and never got to say goodbye, remains unbearable to him.

In 2005 investigators concluded there was no evidence that Slahi had been involved in crimes against the United States or its allies. In 2009 a judge ordered his release, yet he was held for another seven years, without charge or evidence.

SURVIVING THROUGH SINGING AND FORGIVENESS

How do you survive fourteen years in one of the most notorious prisons in the world? For Mohamedou the answer lay in singing and faith. For hours on end he sang, often verses from the Quran, until he was exhausted. That way he held on to something bigger than himself. He also found strength in forgiveness. "Forgiveness is not for the other person, it's for yourself. It helped me

not to be consumed by hatred. I chose to remain human, despite what was done to me."

A NEW BEGINNING THROUGH ART

During his imprisonment and after his release in 2016, Mohamedou began writing his memoir. It became a worldwide success and gave a voice to innocent victims of injustice everywhere. "Writing gives me a way to understand my trauma and come to terms with it. Paper doesn't judge, paper listens." Mohamedou also works on art projects with refugees and other traumatised people. "Art connects us. It helps us turn pain into something beautiful, something that can touch and inspire others."

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Mohamedou stresses how important it is to talk about trauma. "As long as we stay silent, the pain grows. But by sharing, we make room for healing." He hopes his story can inspire others. "If I have learned anything, it is this: trauma makes us vulnerable, but also stronger. If we choose kindness and forgiveness, we can climb out of even the deepest valleys."

His dream? Mohamedou wants everyone to realise that mental health is just as important as physical health. Talking, art and forgiveness are the keys to a healthier and happier life. With his unbreakable spirit and deep empathy, Mohamedou is a powerful example of how resilience can light up even the darkest moments.

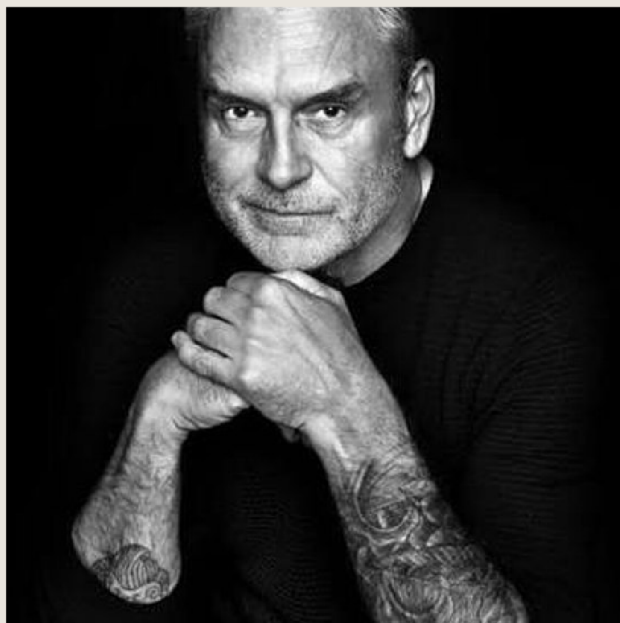
THE ARTISTS



IRENE HOFF

ARTIST | MIXED MEDIA

Irene Hoff makes mixed-media paintings full of colour and layers, playful and piercing at once. Her work is an invitation to reconnect with yourself and to meet life with wonder. She has exhibited solo and in group shows around the world, was included several times in 100 Artists of the Future by The Contemporary Art Curator Magazine, won several awards and was nominated for the Rise Art Prize in London. For the Tour she painted, among others, Isa Hoes, Thomas Dekker, Lena Olivier, Jörgen Raymann and Mohamedou Ould Slahi.



BRENDAN DE CLERCQ

PHOTOGRAPHER | MIXED MEDIA

Brendan de Clercq (Dublin, 1964) is an Irish-French photographer and mixed-media artist, trained at the Fotovakschool in Amsterdam. His work is powerful and emotional, once dark and high-contrast, now lighter and more vivid. He gives masterclasses around the world, is the only certified Profoto trainer in the Netherlands and an ambassador for Sony. His ambition: to one day make the perfect portrait, one that fully captures emotion. For the Tour he photographed nearly all of the people portrayed.

THE ARTISTS



Photo Wouter Verburgt

PETER DONKERSLOOT

ARTIST | PAINTER

Peter Donkersloot (Arnhem, 1959) studied at the art academy in Arnhem and worked as an illustrator for publishers and advertising agencies before choosing to become an independent artist at the end of 1987. He paints layer upon layer in acrylic, in the tradition of the old masters, and is known for his portraits of musicians and other icons. His starting point: there must be a moment where the words stop and the painting begins. For the Tour he portrayed Armin van Buuren, Simon Keizer and Brennan Heart.



Photo Marieke Gras

COLETTE VAN OJIK

ARTIST | INK AND PAINT

Colette van Ojik (Veenendaal) studied at the Amsterdam fashion academy and worked as a costume designer for film and television before becoming an artist in 2004. She works alternately in Amsterdam, Belgium and France and paints in transparent layers, layer upon layer. Alongside her collections Network, Natural Network and Urban she makes portraits in which the eyes tell the story. For the Tour she drew in ink, among others, Eloise van Oranje, Elize, Kim Feenstra, Guido Weijers and Ruben de Ronde.

ICME, IN CASE OF MENTAL EMERGENCY

WHO IS ON YOUR LIST?

Everyone knows ICE, the number others call if something happens to you. ICME turns it around: you decide in advance who you call or text when things are not going well in your head. Two minutes, on your phone.

mentalhealtharttour.nl/en/icme

Need help or someone to talk to? In the Netherlands you can call or chat anonymously with 113 Suicide Prevention, 24/7, via 0800-0113 or 113.nl. In immediate danger, call 112.

COLOPHON

Mind Your Mind

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**MENTAL HEALTH
ART TOUR**

POWERED BY CONNECTING CHAPTER

MENTALHEALTHARTTOUR.NL/EN

**For a broken leg, we get help.
For what goes on in our heads,
we often don't.**