Hearts-minds-lungs-ears-books: An assemblage for taking flight

Hope for me is tenuous and fleeting, and it related to moments when, from my uncomfortable position as a white academic at the front of the class, teaching within a pre-determined and government-approved programme, I make connections to students that don't easily fit into the norms of academia. These are the students that don't come to class as often, don't speak their perspective so often. They come already behind in cultural capital, with judgmental labels hanging over their heads (not interested, not committed, not getting it), their misfit not recognised as related to the limited shapes open to them by the institution.

Hope for me comes when, across these limitations, I connect with students and help them see their relevance, their belonging. The beautiful smile of a shy, marginalised student in my class: the beginning of increased participation and personalisation of content for them. With openings to meaningfully portray their personal and cultural experiences, this student stayed behind in class to work on assignments, and submitted personal, authentic, non-AI mediated work, different to before.

The artwork represents my questions and intentions around creating an inclusive classroom where hearts, minds, lungs, and brains, alongside traditional apparatus such as books and lectures, are free to fly–and perhaps fly better–in their coming-together. It is about the power of relational listening, of belonging, of an open structure to participation to enable possibilities for becoming in higher education, but also, crucially about hospitable, almost-unconditional, spaces for interconnection of diverse bodies where difference is welcomed and accepted. We are all empowered, or rather, our inherent power is recognised and enhanced by this recognition. Can we be becoming-academic without becoming-same / becoming-institutionalised?