Who I am and Who You See

Teresa Alton Borgelin
Konstfack, University of Arts, Crafts and Design
Craft! Jewellery and corpus
Master 2
Spring 2021

Word count: 11 220
Abstract

Now and then other people’s comments and/or behaviour reminds me that I look different and that my external features are connected to something beyond my Swedish identity. My black hair, dark brown eyes and my brownish skin color talk about something else. My appearance is connected to an identity, cultural identity and a country I have little knowledge of and a language I do not master. But still the way I look is a part of my heritage, a part of who I am and a part of me which I am proud of. It makes me wonder what actually makes up an identity and the power we all possess in deciding what or who another person is based on appearance. What do we become in the eyes of the beholder?

Personal experiences from being Swedish, and adopted from another country, becomes the starting point for my investigation where the color of the skin leads to questions about norms, categorisations and the power of labelling another person. Living in the western world, my skin color automatically place me outside the norm. In a way that amazes me, that a single color can determine so much.

As a jeweller maker in this degree project I make brooches. I use them as a method and as tools to both investigate the relationship between personal and social identity and to shed light on how structures in society and other peoples gazes push us into categories consciously and unconsciously. I use my objects as conversations pieces to reflect on history, present and future, from my perspective. There is always a beginning, but it is in the middle of the process it all comes alive. This is where I explore material, techniques and methods and where the brooches are born. They all have a history and part of it is public. At first sight you see the surface. But the brooches are like our bodies, they also have an inside/backside which creates an intimate relationship with the wearer. The brooches are more than ornamented pins, I want them to raise awareness of diversity, different perspectives, care and their ability to communicate as they move through various places attached in different ways to the body.

My degree project, Who I am and who you see, touches upon questions and emotions about belonging, inclusion and exclusion and the state of being in-between. What makes up an identity? What different parts make up a whole? Which layers are added and which are peeled off? All these questions triggers my curiosity and search for more knowledge about the human being and being human.

Keywords: jewellery, personal identity, brooches, layers, categorisation, norms, skin, belonging
Acknowledgment

A special thanks to Carolina Hanser, Magnus Hultman, Veronika Leek and Heléne Wahlberg for answering my questions and sharing your experiences about identity and being adopted.

I am especially grateful to you Teresa Vallejos Limachi for the Bolivian fabrics, your support, taking time to share experiences, answering questions about Bolivia, and especially donating a piece of your hair for me to use in this project.

Thank you Sanna Svedestedt Carboo for generously sharing knowledge about your leather craft and techniques and all the tips and tricks which have been very useful.

My Björkqvist for interesting discussions, being a great listener and always being there to support me in every way when I needed it. Thank you!
## Contents

**Acknowledgement**  
3

**Prologue**  
5

**Introduction**  
The starting point 6  
Background 7

**Theory and context**  
Assumptions and stereotypes 8  
Identity and belonging 9  
Color of the surface 11  
Peeling off 14  
Jewellery and craft 16  
The brooch 18

**Methods and process**  
Where the making begins 20  
Leather 21  
Iron 25  
Textiles 26  
Reaching out 27  
My final installation and presentation 29

**Conclusion**  
30

**Epilogue**  
32

**References**  
33

**Bibliography**  
36

**Appendix I**  
38

**Appendix II**  
39
October 2020, Stockholm

Prologue

A meeting

The nervousness comes suddenly
and without warning.
Maybe because this is a meeting unlike anyone I ever had.

I am standing outside. It is cold and dark.
A police car drives by, slowly.
Do I look that suspicious?

A million thoughts rush through my head.

And then I see her. Teresa.
With long black hair, brownish skin color and dark brown eyes.
She is about the same height as I am, and she resembles me.

A strange feeling and mixed emotions run through my body.

Then suddenly, the meeting is over.

I am leaving with a bag filled with something that feels like a part of me.
A part of my heritage.
Something from Bolivia.
The country I was born in. But also a country and a culture I know little about.

And so a new journey begins.......
Introduction

The body has always been central in my work and in my profession both as a jewellery maker and as an apothecary but in different ways. In addition to the body, communication and interactions play an important role in my process and which I therefore value a great deal. In my artistic practice as a jewellery maker and in this project I make objects to shed light on emotions that might feel difficult to talk about or do not usually get so much space. Jewellery becomes my second skin which together with my body creates an intimate relationship, a powerful communicator and I use it to express and investigate my curiosity and never ending questions about being human, and the human being.

My project is about personal identity and social identity from an adoptee perspective. I investigate and discuss how appearance is involved in seeing another person. It brings up questions about belonging, inclusion and exclusion being a human being in todays society and living in a Western European culture. In the following chapters I will look deeper into how experiences shape how you perceive yourself but also in relation to the norm and the power it emits. The jewellery I make is a part of an investigation about the wearer, and how the objects can be placed or attached to your body.

The starting point

Now and then other people’s comments and/or behaviour reminds me that I look different and that my external features are connected to something beyond my Swedish identity. My black hair, dark brown eyes and my brownish skin color talk about something else, another identity. A cultural identity and a country which I know little about and therefore cannot really relate to. I am grouped together with something I have inadequate knowledge about and with a language I don’t speak. It makes me wonder what actually makes up an identity and the power we all possess in deciding what or who another person is just from looking at the color of someones eyes and/or hair and especially the color of ones skin. Of course there are other factors which also defines who you are for example gender, status, physical abilities or disabilities, religion and so on but in this essay I intend to focus on how we sometimes are quick to draw conclusions from examine the surface, the outside layer, categorise and/or impose an identity on to another person, but it is also about belonging.

In my master project my research question is: how can I use jewellery to investigate and discuss our own perceptions of who we are, as well as who we will become in the eyes of others. The way I perceive and identity myself do not always agree with how other people perceive me. My work focus on personal and social identity and I believe that the identity creation is affected and dependent on a number of factors for example our encounters with other people, structures in society and how/where we were brought up. We all see different things, have different perspectives and that will shape us. As I mentioned above I argue that identity is not just about how we see ourselves, but how other see us as well. There is a relationship between these two which I am interested in. For this I will use the body as a plattform and craft as a tool for my investigation with the intention to make objects that can be used to question norms, categorisations, the power of labelling another person and the identities we possess. It is a complex topic and I see it as a challenge, and at the same time it is a way for me to develop, to share and to learn. The starting point begins with experiences connected to my own personal identity being a Swedish citizen adopted from another country.
Background

I am born in Bolivia, in South America. Only six weeks old I was adopted by a Swedish couple and therefore I don’t have any memories from my native country and I don’t speak Spanish. Most part of my upbringing has been in Sweden (Image 1). But on my ninth birthday I travelled with my family to live in Angola and then Mexico. During this time Swedish traditions and celebrating these as well as being part of the Swedish and nordic community became important. It was a way to maintain the Swedish identity when living in a foreign country. I guess my notion of being Swedish and belonging to the Swedish culture during this time grew stronger. But when telling others that me and my parents were Swedish sometimes caused some confusion because of how different we looked in appearance. All the experiences during my time abroad have contributed to thoughts of belonging, identity and other cultures. They have definitely planted a seed to my curiosity of basic question about who we are and who we will become.

Image 1. Me and my father, 1975
Theory and context

The person who is looking at you has the power to put their own layer on you almost like a new identity whether you like it or not. What they have in their own backpack or knowledge from earlier experiences will have a part in how they interpret what they see and expect. In my own experience as an adopted person being Swedish but not looking like a typical Swedish person this becomes relevant. My external features are interpreted by the viewer and sometimes in the gaze of others I become something I am not.

Assumptions and stereotypes

Most of us use sight and our eyes to take in information to help us analyse and understand our surroundings. If this information is insufficient or wrong either a positive or negative assumption is made. This is how prejudice evolve. In an international review you can read: 'The word prejudice is a modification of the Latin phrase Pree-judicium (pre-judgment), and it is used to indicate pre-judgment, irrespective of facts, for better or worse.' (Sergent and Stajkovic 2019, 393). Stier, author to the book Kulturmöten ((Stier, Jonas, 2019) describes prejudice in a similar way. Prejudice is about when you pre-judge or come to a conclusion before, without any actual experiences and the knowledge comes only from rumours or myths. A prejudice relates to feelings and attitudes about a person or a group of people (Vescio and Weaver 2017). These are often connected to something negative because they are often rooted in the idea that certain types of people are worth less or capable of less than others. In contrast to prejudice, a stereotype is a thought that someone has about specific types of individuals that may or may not accurately be true. They are often overgeneralised images or ideas about particular types of persons for example jews, African Americans, women, homosexuals and so on.

Because of my interest in psychology, the brain, and our behaviour I find prejudice and norms intriguing to question from my perspective. Information of what we see is sent to the brain and then put together to create an image we interpret and then we categorise both persons and objects. This is a natural act and is done from a very early age. Categorising helps us to structure and avoid chaos but most importantly it makes it easier for us to understand and take in information. The way the human being process information from different social situations is called social cognition (Utforska sinnet 2019). To categorise has been important in regard to the human evolution because it has helped us to decide if something is a threat or not. But categorising people can be problematic as it creates a notion of us and them and this can lead to discrimination (Molapour, Golkar, Navarrete, Haaker, Olsson 2015). Hanna Wallensteen is a psychologist who has worked for over 20 years with consequences of racism and she also gives lectures talking about norms, privileges and the term minority stress, (own translation) "it is about the fear of not belonging and to be judged on basis of stereotypical group affiliation." (Modern Psychology, 2020).
Identity and belonging

My South American heritage and characteristic features can be seen on the outside of my body. On the inside I am very much a Swede and it is all I know. My personal identity is Swedish. But I don’t believe we only have just one identity. Throughout life we can be many things and belong to multiple groups.

The human need to belong is strong. It connects us to other people but it also makes us aware that other people are different. But if you think about it, different from what, the norm? How you consider yourself belonging to a group can be in regard to gender, race, sexuality, status, interests and so much more. As an individual you can belong to many groups, it is the same with identity. You don’t only have one identity, you have multiple, and I have many: I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a mother, a friend, an artist and these are just a few. The identity is not only one and rigid, instead you could say it is fluid as I will mention later on. But some identities are also put upon you by other people in which you seldom have control over. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter people have the power to make you into something you are not, something you don’t relate to or maybe wish to be. This can be done by a comment or a certain behaviour.

Having multiple identities and not being categorised as just one, is part of what is meant when talking about intersectionality. Intersectionality revolves around the idea that a person not only have one single identity or belong to one group affiliation, but instead many as mentioned earlier in the text. As a person, our identity is made up by different parts or different group affiliations to which we identify with for example class, gender and ethnicity (POCAura, 2020). In the book, Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies, class, gender and ethnicity are often discussed together with power structures in society. "An intersectional perspective focuses on how these dimensions constitute, intervene and transform each other in the process of exercising power and creating inequalities" (Livholts, 2012, p.117). The origins of intersectionality can be found in the 20th century movements of Modernism and Postmodernism.

During Modernism ideas of identity in regard to Western European countries were that individuals were rational and independent. Postmodernism was in a way a critique to this. Identity in the Postmodern era was fluid (UKessays 2018). Identity was described as fragmented and multilayered. As a concept identity is not fixed and a person can be many selves depending on the situation or context you are in. In the book Themes of contemporary art (Robertson, McDaniel, 2016) identity is viewed from different perspectives. In the chapter on identity, the book describes how artists work with art to demonstrate and explore identity. Their different backgrounds and aim results in a diversity of expressions. A discussion about otherness and representation is described as:

"The body of theory that developed around discussion of identity [...] has been tainted by binary thinking that constructs the identity of an alleged Other by simplistic comparison of two supposedly mutually exclusive terms: male/female, black/white, heterosexual/homosexual, Western/non-Western and so on." (Robertson, McDaniel, 2016, p.65)

Usually one of these binary identities become more valuable and important and could be seen as the norm. The norm becomes part of a power structure. As Vinthagen explains in the book Normkreativ (Vinthagen, 2014) the norms are present in social interactions, but can in time be altered. The book points out that the more we humans are part of a dominating norm the less aware we become of the existing norms and structures. The discussion of diversity and equality are frequent topics in many areas and within the art scene the white norm is present.
Last summer I went to the exhibition 3,5% (2019) at Bångska Våningen (Image 2). All participating artists were non-white artists working in Stockholm and the exhibition referred to a research, made by Ashik Zaman, which was published in a magazine called Konstnären. The research showed that only 3,5% of all the artists that exhibited at established galleries in Stockholm were non-white people. It makes you wonder. But to categorise a group of people to become one unit can be problematic as I mentioned before. Among the non-white people each and everyone has a different history, and so do we who are adopted as well.

In the book Jakten på svenskhett (Mahmood, Qaisar, 2012) the author discusses his own thoughts of identity, his own emotions of belonging and exclusion in Swedish society. The reader gets to follow his journey through Sweden when he travels by motorcycle visiting towns in his search for Swedishness. Being part of the norm or not different perspectives will emerge. As in the book Normkreativ mentioned above the author of Jakten på svenskhett mentions the same thing, how being part of the norm makes you unaware that you are part of the norm. It is when you do not belong to the norm the norm becomes visible and apparent.
Color of the surface

We human all have different shades of our outside layer, the skin. The color of your skin can in some cases tell the viewer about a person's heritage or roughly which part of the world you come from. But this is not always so. People have moved around in the world for many years and some not of their own free will. You may have your own opinion if your skin is dark or light but everything is relative. At one time in my youth I went with my friend to join an international youth camp. There were people from countries all over the world. Many of my friends had a skin color with a much darker shade of brown than my own. Being the "whitest" one was a new experience. I am fascinated how the color of the skin can bring out so many thoughts and emotions among so many people. The color of your skin is connected to power both historically but still today. The human value should be equal regardless your skin color or anything else for that matter.

Along the pathway of searching for materials that could be related to identity and skin I experimented with a birch stump. The bark could be peeled off and I placed them next to each other. I looked at the bark, the outside layer, the skin which also protects the wood inside, almost like a metaphor for the human (Image 3). But the material itself also made me think of birch bark crafts and for me that is very Swedish. The birch is natural, fresh and bright which still today is connected to Swedish and Scandinavian design. It makes me again think about whiteness. In the book Svensk smak (Ahl, Ohlsson, 2001) the author Zandra Ahl raises questions about who has the right to judge and how the whiteness, the clean and smooth surface and slim form become something we associate with good taste (Image 4 and 5). But who has the power to decide that? And is that really what we want, that I want? I love color.

Image 3. Birch wood, Teresa Alton Borgelin, 2020
Thinking about this I remembered a brooch (Image 6) made by artist Maria Sköldin for the project ALLA (Everybody) which was initiated by jewellery artist Ruth-Malin Barklund and Hanna Hedman. The brooch was made in birch and the project was initiated to provide a platform for a discussion of racism in Sweden as a response to the Swedish election in 2010.
Someone that aims to show the diversity and the beauty of colour and who has had her work shown in exhibitions in museums, galleries and public spaces is an artist I admire. Her name is Angélica Dass and she use her artistic practise and personal experiences to reflect on colonial history and talk about the fact that the colour of our skin not only gives a first expression but a lasting one that remains. Angélica Dass is a photographer living in Madrid but she is originally from Brazil. Her work, the Humanae Project, (Image 7) is a collection of portraits of people all over the world which show the diversity of skin colour. All the participants/volunteers, over 4000 people, were photographed and then their skin colour was matched to the Pantone printing colour chart. The chosen colour then became the background colour of the portrait together with the number of the chosen Pantone colour. (ArtNet news, 2018). Her story and her work relate to my project when she talks about how people from just looking at the outside-layer put an identity on another person. In a presentation she did in 2016 (TedTalks, 2016) she shares her story about growing up in a family filled with colours as members of her family is both adopted and have different origins and how her background, experiences and life situations led her to initiate the Humane Project. I relate to this project because of the intentions of the work to highlight our true colours instead of certain colours associated to race. But also that this project applies not only to skin colour but that it is a work made up by people whatever the race, age, gender, sexuality or functional disabilities we have. It makes people reflect on our perceptions and how we look at each other and not to be put in boxes. For me this is not about being some kind of activist its about using your craft to make something that can start a thought or a reflection or even to initiate a conversation about us being humans from a new perspective.

Image 7. *Humanae Project*, Angélica Dass, 2018
Peeling off

What we see is affected by the layers we have and the filters we look through. If these layers are peeled off one by one, what is then left? What is underneath the colour of the skin? In the Swedish artist Marie-Louise Ekman’s work Striptease (1973) you see a woman transforming (Image 8). In the first picture she is all dressed up and in the end she becomes a bird that flies away. She undresses and crawls out of her own skin to become something else. I connect this to my work because I am also talking about changing identities or that they are not static. The reason why you change can differ and also what you want to become nevertheless the transformation will still happen. Identities change over time together with the many roles we play in life both conscious and unconscious. Referring to Ekmans work Striptease this is usually not the medium I work in but I can see how this work can connect to the questions and ideas within my project. The way Marie-Louise been working, in a variety of genres, medias and techniques is on the other hand inspiring. In my own artistic practice I try to use different techniques, mediums and materials because for me this is also a way of discovering new knowledge, to be open for new ideas and use craft as a tool to make that happen.
Looking at Ekman’s work it brings thoughts to something the artist Anna Ting Möller wrote in her thesis, The Baby Bucha Project in 2018.

"I have often felt the need to unzip my skin suit and to leave it in a pile on the floor, next to my trousers" (Ting Möller 2018, p.2)

Anna Ting Möller took her bachelor degree in textile at Konstfack 2018. In her degree project, The Baby Bucha project, (Ting Möller A, 2018) she worked with a material that looked like skin or flesh (Image 9). She started to grow a kombucha culture in tea and sugar. This culture creates a cellulose material that resembles human flesh. She explains her experiences being adopted from China and how the body can feel incompatible because of the norms that are written onto your skin. She discuss how she becomes something because of her appearance. The feeling of double identity and becoming something/someone in the eyes of others fits into my project.

As I mentioned earlier you create your identity by relating to your surroundings in different ways and developing your identity is something you continue to do throughout life. Above I discussed when a layer of identity is added on to a person and when it is peeled off. It is like getting to know someone. What you see at first sight can turn out to be something totally different. The deeper the relationship gets you will see the human being and visual appearance will become something else. We all want to be accepted, respected and the human need to belong is strong. Identity is therefore important.

Image 9. The Baby Bucha Project, Anna Ting Möller, 2018
Jewellery and craft

Nowadays I do not wear jewellery very often. But that doesn’t mean I don’t like it. On the contrary, I am immensely fascinated by jewellery as a phenomenon. It seems the varieties of how to wear them and why are limitless. In the book Jewellery Matters the author Marjan Unger writes:

"People wear jewellery to communicate their own identity, social status and beliefs to others, to channel their desires and to indicate where they come from and with whom they feel a connection.” (Unger 2017, p.521).

The interaction between jewellery and body and the jewellery itself arouses emotions in the wearer, the maker and who gaze upon it.

"Jewellery pertains to people’s self-image and the ways in which they relate to each other; a jewellery item is like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle in how people demarcate their identity and reveal themselves to others. Pieces of jewellery are wearable objects and as such pre-eminently suitable as signs of affirming one’s position within a society. They may thereby stress mutual similarities as well as differences amongst individuals. Additionally, they are vehicles for mitigating fears, they testify to the human joy of decoration or they help to keep memories alive.” (Unger 2019, p.16)

In my practice material and techniques to make jewellery are important and I believe they can help to mediate information and enhance what I wish to communicate. Archaeological finds (Image 10) show that the first jewellery pieces to adorn the body were made from shells, teeth, stones, ivory and horn (Unger 2017). It is exciting to see how material, design, methods have changed through history.

Image 10. Egle claws found in a rock shelter in Croatia dated about 130,000 years ago

In beginning of 20th century, design was characterised by function and ornamentation was considered unnecessary and distracting. The geometric, simplicity and functional permeated architecture as well as the art of jewellery. But in the late 20th century, during Postmodernism, there was a noticeable change. Functionality was no longer of essence instead influences from different genres were mixed. Designers experimented with materials and surfaces and imitation, for example, the grains in wood as in plastic laminate which became popular during this time (Miller J 2010). In the art of jewellery artists did the same and experimented more freely and
worked in both precious and non-precious material (Lindroth H 2012). This change is also described in the book Swedish Contemporary Art Jewellery (Wästberg, 2013). The author and Swedish collector of jewellery, Inger Wästberg, explain how art jewellery made a shift in the late 1990s and how artists started to break from a more traditional view on jewellery. Earlier in the time of Modernism jewellery was often made from precious metals and stones and without much decorative details. But during this shift jewellery artists became more and more interested in letting the idea or concept behind the pieces of jewellery take over. Not only the concepts were in focus, also the exploration of materials and letting new perceptions take form. Two jewellery artists who challenged the traditional materials are brought to our attention:

"Åsa Skogberg and Helena Sandström were among the first to break with earlier conventions through their use of photos and perishable materials in their jewellery." (Wästberg, 2013, p.19)

Åsa Skogberg challenged the way we traditionally look at jewellery. Instead of working with metals and precious stones she investigated other ways and materials that could be used to create jewellery, and also how these could be presented. This can be seen for example in her work, I want pearls (1998, Image 11). In this work she uses the reference of the traditional pearl necklace. A gift to the woman as an act of love as are the kisses on her neck placed as a strand of pearls. The necklace, a choker, made out of hickeys, also talks about being strangled by traditions. The act of being marked and put in a frame placed on a desk as a trophy brings thoughts to ownership and power. (Wästberg, 2013).

"It is in the eye of the beholder [...] that the story begins." (Wästberg, 2013, p. 164)
I relate and connect my own project to Skogbergs work with the discussion of ownership, power
and labelling another person. In my craft and process of making the material and techniques are
are a way to visualise this together with thematics of inclusion and exclusion. Craft in my artistic
practice enables me to reach out and find ways to connect both with people and material. The
process therefore becomes precious. It can’t be rushed but as time is my greatest enemy there is
always challenges to find solutions to.

For me craft brings people together, it is an opportunity for collaborations and sharing knowledge
and learning. It is a learning and understanding for me how we work together and social
interactions. Craft in contemporary society as I look at it can be a multiple of things which also
allows me to experiment more and push my own limits. In the book Konsthantverk i Sverige del 1
(Zetterlund, Hyltén-Cavalius, Rosenqvist, 2015) different aspects of crafts are discussed together
with how the applied arts in Sweden have developed during the past years and how the making
and materiality is used as a method to investigate society. This is how I see myself working and
using craft as a tool in my artistic practice to communicate. An investigation of finding ways to
communicate with jewellery as a vehicle. Artisits in the book, mentioned above, share their
different perspectives on making and in the next chapters I will share mine, but I will start by
introducing you to one specific item of jewellery, the brooch.

The brooch

I have chosen to work with the brooch. As an object it becomes the interface between the
intimate and the public. I use the brooch as a method in this project because I believe it can be a
strong communicator and because it has a special relationship to the body. The brooch have
through time been used for many reason both functional, adornment and to convey a message.
The primary function was to fasten clothing and the precursor to the brooch is the so called fibula
which in Latin means “to pierce” or “to attach”. The brooch back pin goes through the clothes and is then attached to the body. This is how most
of my brooches will be attached in my work. By being attached to the body it can follow the
wearer and together they will travel through different places not being bound to a certain place.
The front of the brooch is for the viewer to see. The brooch becomes the boundary between
person and environment and in that way a surface to communicate messages (Malev 2017). What
fascinates me with the brooch is the two sides, the front and the back. They can be very
separated but also completely dependant on each other. It is an intriguing relationships to explore.
It is like the body, it has an outside people can see and it has an inside which maybe not everyone
will see. It is up to the wearer to decide. Together the inside and outside make up a whole.

In my project I discuss the outside of the body, the surface and what is seen by the viewer and at
the same time what is beneath the surface or on the other side. The body carries information
which the viewer interpret. It is the same with the brooch. The brooch has one side that is directed
towards the viewer or the public with information, and the other side of the object will have a more
intimate relation with its wearer. That side is only seen by the wearer but can be revealed
whenever the wearer decides. It is all about communication and for it to work there has to be a
sender and a recipient. In my world jewellery is a magical way to communicate and depending on
what kind of jewellery you use you can facilitate where and when this communication takes place.
Unlike the ring the brooch is faced forward all the time and can be viewed both if the wearer is
sitting or standing. It is an object that is attached to your body and it will follow you as you move
around.

The American singer, songwriter and actress Lady Gaga recently used the brooch as medium for
communication. She was one of the persons who attended and performed at the inauguration
wearing a statement dove brooch to symbolise peace (image 12). I think the brooch is an effective
way of making a statement and a possibility to send a message to a lot of people, of course
depending on the situation.
Another person I want to mention is the former US foreign minister Madeleine Albright. She used the brooch for making political and social statements (Malev 2017). It all started when she was the US ambassador to the United Nations and she was compared of being an “unparalleled serpent”. It was one of the things she was said to be in a poem written in Bagdad when enforcing sanctions against Iraq (Albright 2009). During official debates she then wore a pin with a snake (Image 13) (The Gazette, 2013). I believe that depending on the message courage is also needed because not every message is an easy one to make nor to receive.
Method and process

I am a maker. In my practice I use materials to investigate and communicate my ideas. I use my mind and my hands to create, and usually a multiple of methods and techniques are involved. As I mentioned before I have a strong belief about sharing and learning from each other and during this research and making that has been a big part of the investigation. In the following chapters I will share this journey and my perspectives of making.

Where the making begins

In the middle of the process this is where I thrive best, the in-between stage. This is where my experiments and investigations of both material and techniques are made through trial and error. In the middle of the process material investigations are just as important as the exchange of information and discussions. This is where the making begins. This is where I choose my methods, or they choose me. My overall method in this project is jewellery. I will use the brooch as a method to stimulate discussions and generate thoughts about the perception of oneself and how that can alter depending on your own appearance and the interplay with other people. In the following chapter I will give you an insight into my methods and making.

I started by investigated color, value and power. I needed a material that could remind us of skin as my starting point was how the appearance and color of our skin are used to categorise humans even today. I wanted to try out if I could combine this with the idea of fake and real. So I started to experiment with materials that either might look like skin but it actually is not or materials that had some kind of connection to identity.

I chose to work with a special paper, so called stone paper. The original colour of the paper is white but I coloured the paper and made it look like skin. I made two shades of brown and one white (Image 14). I wanted to lead thoughts to race, diversity, history, value and ownership. This brought to mind questions about being marked and thoughts related to the white norm and colonialism and the power structures of today.

Image 14. Skin-like objects and a stamp necklace on iron sheet, Teresa Alton Borgelin, 2019
These tryouts with paper and attempt to transform it to look like skin or leather was my beginning of investigating identity through material. Working like this also raised questions about authenticity and being true to a material. For that reason, how would my idea change if I would work with real leather instead? I had to take time to explore this. In the following text I will share my experiences working with three of my main materials in this degree project: leather, iron and textile.

**Leather**

Leather is a material I have never worked with before even though thoughts of skin have been on my mind for a while working with this project. I find this material exciting but at the same time unpleasant and uncomfortable. Uncomfortable for ethical reasons, but also because I have been exploring value, ownership and who has the power to judge or put a label on you. The way humans have historically demonstrate ownership and power especially related to branding is very much connected to skin. It doesn’t matter if its human or animal skin, the act is still very unpleasant to even think about. I needed to get more knowledge about this material which led me to apply to a course in leather craft in order to learn the basics. During this time I got to try working with pergament which is a type of animal skin that is untreated and has not been through a tanned process. I made a few tests in shaping it with different methods. An interest in leather grew (Image 15).

![Image 15. Pergament experiments, Teresa Alton Borgelin, 2020](image)

With this pergament I used the method of squeezing, forcing, pushing and draping. It turned out to be a bit more difficult than I anticipated. The pergament was stiff and hard to work with. I needed to soak in in water in order to easier make it do what I wanted. I cut pieces which I draped over a welded iron construction and a welded iron circle. With some pieces I pushed and squeezed the pergament into a circular form. I needed to secure it in order for the pergament to stay in my predetermined form while drying to again become stiff and hard. The welded iron objects became the symbol of categories. The pergament got to symbolise the human, a human being pushed into a category involuntary, being shaped into something its not.
But in the end I went back to work with tanned leather continuing to force it into a box shaped as a circle. The colors were significant, the brown/black versus the light colors (Image 16 and 17).


Image 17. Brooch II, Teresa A Borgelin, 2020
I started sewing in the material with and using different shades. The stitches became another layer. They evoked thoughts of hurting and power. I had earlier visited the ethnographic museum. There was an ongoing exhibition about the indigenous population in Australia and about a Swede who led an expedition, Eric Mjölberg, who had illegally collected crania and brought them back to Sweden (Ethnographic museum 2020). In one of the monters objects, you see in the image below (Image 18), was displayed. One of the items was a chart used by colonists to determine the shade of brown of the aborigines.

Again I am amazed how a color can determine so much. I wonder what is needed to make people look beyond the color of our skin and see the whole person. Equal value regardless of how we look or less of this categorising people, I wonder how it will look in the future?

During this time I also worked with wood, birch wood. The reason for working with birch wood was the light color and that it is used in Swedish design which I mentioned in the chapter, Color of the surface. Birch could be my metaphor for the Swedishness. During the walks by the water nearby my home I found birch logs which I carried home one by one. My thoughts then revolved around the idea of identity being build up by different pieces or layers to create one unit. I used a hand saw to saw slices I sawed one by one, and together they became layers and the bark became the skin. What would happen if the bark was removed? This is shown in an earlier photo (Image 3).

I experimented with the birch wood in different ways (Image 19). I wanted to see if I could use it to talk about the different parts that make up an identity and what these parts could be or represent so I broke them into smaller pieces. What if something was missing or could be removed but still attached? Covered or replaced? The backside partly visible from the front? What could the chain represent? Could the pieces still work together? (Image 20). The geometric form, the circle, became more central in my work and I use it to represent the whole.
Image 19. Experiments with birch, 2020

Iron

Iron in its solid form is hard and rigid. In this degree project iron symbolises among other things construction, institution and society. In my working process I have experimented with iron in multiple ways and with the force of my body and different tools I have transformed this material into desired shapes. I have used pushing and bending and different kind of welding techniques to get where I am today with my objects. All these different acts of building which eventually and slowly leads to a final construction can be related to how a society is build up. The welding results in a seam that holds everything together. The construction, the round container can also be looked at as something that delimits (Image 21). I am still investigating size and thus also the weight and to integrate the pin with the construction. How the leather will be attached is not yet decided, experiments are still ongoing.

Textiles

At first sight I see the colors and the patterns. I recognise them from pictures from Bolivia, textiles wrapped around the body and often fasten with a knot at in the front, sometimes used to carry things on their backs. I will the fabric into something else but which can also be worn on the body, almost like a patch. I have four different types of fabrics from different cities. I choose one. Carefully I start to cut pieces. I do it reluctantly because I do not know if I will ever be able to get more of this material. Its loaded with so many emotions and I choose carefully which parts i will use. Nothing is thrown away. With different methods I transfer the texture to metal (Image 22) and eventually they become jewellery. I make molds, melt vax which I then can use to either cast or electroform. Every step is important and every time a displacement is made and the objects becomes something else. They look quite similar to one another but looking closer you see they are different, different metals even. Some are solid and some are hollow thus creating a shell. The original transforms into something new. It takes time and each and everyone becomes unique.

Image 22. From textile to metal, Teresa Alton Borgelin, 2021
Reaching out

Besides investigating and collecting physical material and working with my hands, reaching out to other people is often a big part of my working process because I believe it makes me and my work develop. I try to have an open mind and cherish my curiosity and I think this is very much reflected in the way I work. Reaching out and contacting people to exchange information is a method for me but it is also definitely a challenge. Experiences from encounters are valuable and I see them as tools in making craft.

In my research searching for artists working with leather I came across the jewellery artist Sanna Svedestedt Carboo. Leather craft is in focus in Sanna Svedstedt Carboo’s work (Jewellers Klimt02). She is a Swedish art jeweller and I was intrigued by how she work and her method of forming the material. It became even more interesting when I continued to read further about her when she mentioned that what intrigues her is the connection between identity, heritage and culture (Image 23).

To get a more personal and deeper knowledge about her leather craft, to broaden my network and also to get the opportunity to tell someone I did not know about my project, I decided to contact Sanna. So I emailed her and asked if she would answer some questions about her her. I was lucky because she invited me to listen to an artist talk held in December last year. She had then been invited by METALOphone museum in Vilnius to talk about her work and use of experimental leather techniques in jewellery making (METALOfonas 2020). I was struck by her openness to share her work. I invited her to listen to my presentation about my project in January 2021. Later that month I set up a zoom meeting to ask her the remaining questions. She told me she was brought up in Jämtland in northern Sweden and that her grandparents taught her crafting in textile and wood. It wasn’t until her bachelor in jewellery when leather craft came into her work (Carboo S 2021). We continued to stay in touch and I got some useful tips and trix in how to shape the leather. In the end I am happy craft can bring people together and open doors to share knowledge.

Inviting people from outside the craft field to be a part of my project is valuable in a different way. I see it as an opportunity to let people discover this magical world of jewellery and again a way for me to challenge myself. Contacting people I don’t know requires energy especially in this particular situation. I wanted to hear if people with similar background as myself had similar experiences and emotions about identity and belonging growing up. I decided to use a Facebook group whose members are Swedes adopted from Bolivia, which I am also a member of. But in order to get some information I first needed to post a short text in this group telling people about my project and what I was looking for. I did not anticipate that it would be so difficult to write this. I postponed it as long as I could. It was almost too late when I finally did it. The first respond came quickly.

I came here 1974.
I was 6 weeks old.
You can ask me anything about adoption, double identity, anything
I will answer from my perspective and how I experienced it. I can be part of your project if you want.

(Helène Wahlberg 2021)

In the end four persons answered a questionnaire I made. These answers I got became extra precious. I kept them to myself. I needed to reflect, and I needed to figure out what I felt reading all the answers. It took a lot of energy but at the same time gave me more that I expected in return. One person wrote to me over a period of time, one answer to one question at a time. I never knew when it would appear in my inbox. They became like small treasures. At the moment I look at this material as part of my background material. In the beginning I thought I would make something with this material but I needed more time. In time I might share them but with who and when is too early to say right now.
My final installation and presentation

My thoughts on how the final installation will be is beginning to take shape, at least in my head even though all of the final objects are still not finished. In the prologue I talk about a bag filled with something that is part of me and my heritage. Its fabrics, textiles, I got from Teresa Vallejos Limachi. They have become very precious to me (Image 24). I have four different textiles which comes from different cities in Bolivia. Earlier I knew I wanted at least one of these textiles to be part of the final installation together with the brooches. I will use one of the most colourful textiles and it will hang on the wall with a knot at the top. I will attach at least one of the smaller brooches to it. Some of the objects have small details which you might not see right away but they are important. I have enamelled small pins in different colors that will be used as pin mechanisms in some of the brooches. I want color to be present in different ways.

On the wall there will also be a bigger wall-brooch made of iron with leather inside which is shaped as a hammer. The technical solution enables the viewer to move the object to the side revealing the backside of the object. The hammer stands for building up or breaking. The hammer has also been a tool for hammering on the iron chain.

The centrepiece on the wall will be a circular brooch in brass which I first silver-plated and then gold-plated. It is one of the most precious objects in the installation. Holding the circle is the hair of Teresa Vallejos Limachi who I got the textiles from. Hair is for me very much connected to identity. The pin is made in silver which has a blue enamelled surface. It is hanging in a gold-plated tube which enables the pin to be hidden inside the tube. This way you will only see the enamelled blue top.

On the wall there will also be a shelf where all the brooches made from one of the textiles will be displayed. They are still not finished when I write this. All the pin mechanisms needs to be done.

Besides using the wall I want to have a smaller table where I will place my smaller iron brooches with leather on small stands. If the brooches are placed on a table it will be easier for the viewer to come closer. The viewer would also be able to walk around the table making it possible to see the backside of the brooches and the pin mechanisms. Brooch and stand can become one unit. It is also a way to store the jewellery when not on the body and makes it easy to move around, displacing it.

Time will tell how many objects I will have in the end.

The examination will be different this year. I was looking forward to doing the final presentation live and taking the opportunity to make some kind performance, but the presentation will be pre-filmed this year. I am not a fan of being in front of the camera which also requires a lot of preparations and therefore it is not something I look forward to. Still it is going to be interesting to see how it all will works out in the end.
Conclusion

My master project began with the reflection that a person’s identity and self-perception does not always agree with how other people perceive you; we see different things. A lot of factors are involved in how we perceive another human being, especially at first sight. In my thesis I intended to investigate personal and social identity. The starting point was my own experiences of being adopted from Bolivia but a Swedish citizen since a very young age. I wanted to get a deeper understanding of what an identity is and how other people and society are involved in shaping who we will become, especially with my background. The aim has been to communicate my thoughts and share my findings using jewellery as a vehicle and to contribute to a broader discussion on the theme of identity.

Through my research I now have more knowledge about identity and how it is shaped. The topic identity is big and complex, I knew that from the beginning, but moving forward in the process I realised that it is even more complex than I first thought. Identity is a topic a lot of artists worked with before me but I know my story is different. I look at myself and my experiences as assets in this project. This is my investigation and my version. A lot of emotions have surfaced during this time and it has not been a straightforward journey, but an important one for many reasons where the writing also helped me sort out my thoughts in order to make my objects. New encounters have been made together with new experiences and new information. These have been added as layer upon layer, shaping who I will become. As always layers will fall off while others will almost be absorbed by the body to become part of who you are. These layers can also be peeled off, either way there is often more to discover if you start scratching on the surface. Don’t miss the small details.

Our identity is shaped when we understand ourselves in relation to how other people behave and perceive us. A social identity is described by the different groups I identify myself with, and a personal identity describes how I differentiate myself from other individuals who are part of the same groups as me. But this process is in constant change because new experiences affect us as we go through life and therefore new groups can emerge and others may be dissolved, but regardless they leave traces. It has become more clear that being part of a norm can create a notion of we and them but also being part of a dominating norm makes people the less aware of the existing norms and structures. My interest in psychology and why we do the things we do is often present in my work. Closer to the end of this project I can see that the research and experiments have given me a deeper understanding of human behaviour and material knowledge and my own artistic practice and process. I have had to challenge myself to find answers and solutions but still a lot of questions remain and some new have been added.

A meeting in October slightly altered the direction of the project which I did not anticipate. This brought up memories and emotions about my own heritage, which I am proud of but know little about. It made me reflect even more on belonging, inclusion and exclusion. Interviews with people with similar background triggered questions and research also reminded me that it is usually not me myself who feel different from everyone else it is what other people say or do that makes me aware of that. I am somewhere in between and sometimes that is hard but it can also be a happy place, for example being in the middle of the process, taking advantage of my curiosity in material and techniques, reaching out to people, exchanging knowledge and to let jewellery and craft be a part of that. Jewellery can be used in so many ways to communicate. It can be magical.

Categorising is a human phenomenon and we all do it. It helps us to make it easier to sort out and take in information and to prevent chaos. But categorising people can be dangerous especially if prejudice and stereotyping are involved. My brooches talk about being pushed into a box, categorised and not in a positive way. My brooches also talk about being in-between, different parts and what makes a whole. I know that some will understand, some will not, some will relate, some not, some will think these are important issues to raise and to reflect upon and some will not. But it doesn’t matter, for me the most important thing is to raise the topic on how we see each other and that a person is more than the color of the skin and what we see at first sight is not the whole picture. The skin has a function, it is there to protect us. But historically the color of the skin has definitely been connected to value and power, white being superior to black. You see it in history, you still see it today but I hope that in the future it will be different. The norms in
society do not occur by themselves, they are made by us humans. What is important to remember is that it is also we who can question and change them.
Epilogue

We travelled up into the mountains in a jeep.
I lay on the ground feeling so close to heaven.
I remember thinking.
What a beautiful country I come from.

(Wahlberg 2021)
References


Miller, Judith (2010). 1900-talets design: [den kompletta handboken]. Askim: Tukan


Vinthagen, Rebecca & Vinthagen, Rebecca (2014). Normkreativ. 1. uppl. Stockholm: Premiss


Electronic references

Artnetnews, 2018. "This Artist Took 4,000 Portraits to Show the Range of Human Skin Color—and the Results Exceeded the Pantone Library". https://news.artnet.com/art-world/4000-skin-colors-in-pantone-squares-1254683


POCAura Podden, 2020. "Minoritetsstress och strategier med Hanna Wallensteen". Podcast


Image references


Borgelin Alton, T 2019, Untitled, image, It's all about the journey, Konstfack, Stockholm.


Borgelin Alton, T 2020. Untitled, image, pergament, 5x5 cm, Stockholm.


Borgelin Alton T 2021. Textiles into metal, image, 4x8 cm, Stockholm.


Carboo Svedstedt, S 2013, Building Blocks, image, viewed 20 april 2020, https://klimt02.net/jewellers/sanna-svedestedt


InStyle 2021, image, President Biden’s inauguration, viewed 210123, https://www.instyle.com/celebrity/lady-gaga/lady-gaga-inauguration-outfit

Montero Bravo, A 2019, Body modification I, private photograph from: Exhibition 3,5%


Sköldin, M 2013, Spegel spegel, image, birch and mirror plastic, 12x7.5x1 cm, ALLA, Stockholm.


Wahlberg, H 2000, Mountains in Bolivia, private image, Cochabamba

Bibliography


Bobbeck, E, https://www.emmabobeck.com


Karim, O 2017, De ensamma - a documentary about adoption, viewed 17 January 2021, https://www.psykologperspektiv.se/media


Lambert, M 2020, Artist talk. Athens jewellery week.


Morganpasset i P3 2020, *Psykologen hanna Wallensteen om minoritetsstress*, Podcast, listened to January 2021

POCAura, 2021, Frågor till Konstfack från vårt perspektiv, video on Konstfacks website 18/2.


Stressgäris & icke-binäris, https://www.stressgaris.se/poc


SVT Play 2014, Raskortet. Swedish documentary, listened to May 2020

SVT Play 2013, Saint Barthélemy - vår sista koloni. Swedish documentary. Open archive

Vems blick? Vems berättelse? - Hur en inkluderande kultur skapas, med haha Sanneh o Seher Yilmas mfl, YouTube video 210319 shown on Facebook shared by Hanna Wallensteen PsykologPerspektiv AB


Appendix I

I contacted Sanna Svedestedt Carboo 29 October 2020. I emailed her some questions about her work as a jewellery artist. She invited me to participate in an artist talk she was going to have 15 December 2020 and then I invited her to listen to my six minutes presentation about my project on 11 January 2021. On 28 January 2021 we met on zoom so that I could ask the last questions. Here are a few of the questions I first sent to Sanna:

• How did you get started with leather craft?
• What does leather give you that other material do not?
• How and where does identity, heritage and culture relate to your work and what meaning has it for you?
• Do you have any tips about techniques forming leather?

On 12 January I posted a short text, in the Facebook group “Adopted from Bolivia”, about my project and asking if anyone would want to share thoughts and experiences about living and being brought up in Sweden. I also said that I might use it in my project. The people who contacted me, Carolina Hanser, Magnus Hultman, Veronika Leek and Heléne Wahlberg, all got further information about me and the project in an email. I then put together about 20 questions which I sent to all participants and everyone answered all of the questions. Below you can see some of the questions I asked but I am not going to share all the questions nor the individual answers in this paper.

• How old were you when you came to Sweden?
• Which year are you born?
• How did you experience school when you were growing up? Were there other adoptees? people of color?
• Do you want to share an experience when you became aware of that you looked different?
• How do people react when you say that you are Swedish? Do you say that you are Swedish? Do you feel Swedish?
Appendix II

Reflections from exam exhibition 12 April - 16 April 2021

For the exam exhibition I got assigned a spot in "Vita Havet" at Konstfack. There is a long wall on one side of the room and I was placed in the middle. We were in the end six persons assigned to use the same wall and even though it was a bit crowded I think that Åsa Johansson and my objects really worked well together, and it was a nice transition between our works. It was a good experience to exhibit my jewellery in such a big room but it was also a challenge to install them so that they would not disappear in this huge space, especially when placed close to objects that were much bigger.

Right before my exam exhibition I heard that a jewellery object had been stolen at an earlier exhibition made by students in the bachelor programme at Ådellab. This made me rethink if I needed to secure my brooches somehow. I hadn’t planned to do that as I believe it creates a barrier between the objects and the viewers both emotionally and visually. But I felt I needed to come up with a solution to secure the brooches to be able to leave them unwatched during the day. I managed to come up with an almost invisible solution to secure them but in the end I didn’t use it. Instead I came early every morning to set everything up and during the day I sat close by, keeping an eye on my objects, while listening to the other students examinations which took place on the digital platform zoom. It was interesting to observed how other students stopped, when passing through the room, to take a closer look at our objects and read our exhibition texts.
The presentations of our projects were pre-recorded but comments and questions from guest critics was broadcasted live on zoom. Each student sat by their work during the examination which was nice and it was a new experience to have a peer present together with the invited guest critic. I would have preferred to do the presentation of my project live and not pre-recorded. In that way I could have had more control in how and what I wanted to present during the examination. I believe some projects worked better than others in this format that was decided for 2021, mine was not one of them.

During my five years in Konstfack I have each spring listened to the master examinations and it has been interesting as they have differed from year to year. There have been positive and negative experiences each year and you never know how the opponent or guest critic will implement their task. In my own examination I was prepared to defend and discuss different aspects of my work to a much greater extent than I did. But it was interesting to hear what Lou Lou Cheminet saw in my work and what it made her think about, and most of the time it felt she saw what I wanted to communicate. How the examination was implemented this year was definitely a new experience and a challenge in many ways.

**Reflections from Konstfack Spring Exhibition 22-28 May 2021**

To be placed in a room of my own for the Spring Exhibition, instead of being in "Vita Havet", was a good experience. A room creates a more intimate space, especially if it is a smaller room as the one I got. I think my work benefited and worked better in a smaller room and that is also what some people told me. Even though I showed the same objects the placing of them were different, because this time I had more walls to work with. In the end I decided to add and show two new objects for the Spring Exhibition.

I decided to keep the table I had made and which I had used during the previous exhibition but to place it differently. My room was quite small so I needed to think about how I wanted visitors to move in the room to be able to see my brooches from different angles. I placed the table close to the wall to change the squareness of the room and to experiment how to make people move from one room to another as visitors needed to pass through my room to see Sofia Bahlers work in the room next to mine. Another thing to consider was the window next to the door. Placing the table as I did you could see it better when coming from "Vita Havet" and I thought that was important to make people want to enter mine and Sofias room as it was a bit off the side.

The small stands (seen in Image 24) placed on the table was removed and brooches were placed directly on the table and this worked better in the more intimate room also making the brooches more approachable to visitors. As I mentioned earlier two new objects were added to my work for the Spring Exhibition. I wanted to present a selection of the questions, together with the answers, I asked people in the Facebook group "Adopted From Bolivia" which was an important part of my research but not presented in the first exhibition. Questions and answers were printed on a material that looked like copper to make it fit the other metal objects rather than having them printed on a piece of paper. I got a positive response showing this and it felt good to make that part of the project more visible. The second new object I made was a booklet showing the process of making. I got a good response on this as well and it was useful to have when explaining how I made my brooches and the different techniques I used. Both new objects were a good experience to see and understand how I could use other kind of objects to discuss my work and artistic practice to a viewer who see the work for the first time and who is not a crafter.
Prior to the spring exhibition I decided to contact and invite some people. For example I invited Sanna Svedestedt Carboo who have been following my work and whom I got many tips on how to work with leather. She gave me a very nice feedback and also said it had been nice to follow the process, but most of all I appreciated her sharing knowledge and that is something I hope I can pass on. The psychologist Hanna Wallensteen who I contacted earlier during my research work responded very quickly to my invitation and she wanted to see both the presentation video and read my essay. I feel very grateful she took the time to read my essay, see the presentation video and pictures both at my Instagram and Konstfack website and then give me such wonderful feedback. I sent an email and invited Tobias Hubinette who has written a lot about race and adoption and I was honoured that he took the time to come to Konstfack to see my work and even more that he also mentioned my project and posted images of my work on his Instagram account. That I managed to reach people outside Konstfack and people who do not work with craft as a living felt important and also intriguing that I was able to make others curious about how jewellery can be used as conversation pieces. It has triggered me even more to continue with my artistic practice and with topics that involve people and society.

Apart from this I had some interesting discussions with visitors during this last week both with people I know and don’t know. Discussions concerning heritage, society and labelling came up as well as a lot of interest in how I made my brooches and the different materials I used. Talking about the processes of making and what the material and techniques mean was interesting and it felt like the visitors got a deeper understanding how much work every object required but also how material and techniques can be used to talk about a specific topic. I am still not sure how important it is to reveal the whole story when presenting the final pieces. This I will continue to experiment with. Being present in the room I could also show how the brooches could be worn on the body. The brooches on the small shelf were the only ones that I decided to secure in order to be able to leave them overnight. But I could still show them and let people hold them to feel the weight and to take a closer look at details. The meeting that gave me the most was when Teresa, who donated a braid for one of my brooches, came with her husband on the first day. He told me about traditions in Bolivia and how brooches were used to attach textiles, the use of the circle and
its connection to the sun and also the use of chains. I am very grateful for both of their thoughts and for sharing them with me. The circle feels almost complete.