Research Lab is a full time, year-long course hosting crafts practitioners, those wanting to explore their work through craft methodologies, and who seek to engage with the meanings and makings of artistic research. Carrying materiality as a topical issue, the 2022–2023 iteration focused on how craft practice can charge and orient research, inviting course participants to make, voice, read, and write about their practices as methods and conditions for research. The course concludes with Field Notes (working title), a publication and a self-organised exhibition and discursive walk, from Konstfack towards Medborgarhuset¹, extrapolating individual practices as shared experiences.

For Field Notes (working title)
Doing research, pedagogy, material culture and reciprocity
Together we sat on zoom, for lunch, dinner, at my place, at yours, the allotment, at school, via text, on the phone, and over email. We sat with students, being students, learning to listen and sense a pedagogy together. We made coffee or tea, and brought buns, and soon enough hosting came in natural turns throughout the group. We hosted within the slight precarity of academic hourly employments, and a landscape of self-motivation and personalities, expectations, rights and responsibilities, where the relationship of teaching-learning ² is far from linear.

One of the first sessions was held at Medborgarhuset with Jenny Richards³, and we spent that initial meeting developing a collective care agreement, drawing on the practices of Feminist collectives and using tools developed within the Disability Justice movement. Research Lab was invited “to consider our different care needs and how we might develop a tool to support our interdependent relationships of care and criticality through the course.”⁴

¹ A place for public education, community life and culture, in southern Stockholm.
² We share a pedagogical practice where we don’t believe in a hierarchy of knowledge.
³ Doctoral candidate at Konstfack, her research focuses on the politics of work, health and the body, often developed through collaborative and collective practice.
⁴ Borrowed from Jenny Richards’s workshop invitation to the Research Lab group, via email 6th September 2022.
These incipient moments set the tone, the atmosphere, and the spirit of the space we were generating with the group: a space that could hold difference, acknowledge and validate knowledge-sharing, ways of making, speaking, and walking towards the notions of being with craft, and not just defining it through materiality. We explored the possibilities and terrains of research creation within and beyond the confines of the field.

Re-orienting a postgraduate course on research development in the field of material culture/Crafts has been as much about resisting forms of categorisation, as about giving in to the differentiation of languages—artistic, academic, literary—and bringing them together despite different logics. A decolonial pedagogy is key to undoing hierarchies of power and disciplinary constraints, and we relied on the making of a collective space for revealing connections, as a decolonial approach to how we gather and produce knowledge. We practised and learned by listening, and relying on reciprocity. Taking notes when students shared work, and offering these perambulations, was one of the ways towards horizontality and care. We shared our own work in progress for feedback and engagement, creating a space of reciprocal tending.

Together with the students we engaged in self-presentations, automatic writings, made room for a variety of invited guests, travelled north, listened and spoke, touched, shared, and experienced the growth, burdens, and depths of the different processes. Irit Rogoff’s *Becoming Research* was a guide in our efforts to situate ourselves in our various practices, engaging in what Rogoff refers to as “working from conditions,” as opposed to working from “inherited knowledges.” 7 Natalie Loveless’s *How to Make Art at the End of the World* challenged and endorsed our grasp and interpretations of art practices as research methods. Loveless makes a clear shift from artistic research to research creation. She unpacks the value of creative practices and their disruptive contribution to challenging conventional notions of what research-creation is and can be.

And so, granted with geographical variety and interdisciplinarity in the group, materiality broke out subjective lines, opening fissures in artistic, research and pedagogical struggles. Together we embraced the precarious places the research took us. Forming spaces of care and tending for the balancing acts we all have found ourselves in. Reminding each other of the value of precarity, creating literacy in field specificities, while combining and reconfiguring moments to create productive rupture.

If our conversations closed in on the questions *What is artistic research? Is what I practice research? How does Crafts (do) research?* then the obtuse and ever-processing answers became a space for imagination and trust. Within this space, research in practice can be a means to interrogate and understand social and environmental inferences of material culture, a wider terrain for inflection, thinking and making.

Karolina Janulevičiūtė’s practice responds to contemporary urgencies of extractive capitalism and environmental crisis, giving agency to the garments she makes, de-centering the human towards a wider locus and relationship with Earth. Daniela Toledo Escárate’s *virado* is as much a way to speak about scarcity, modernity, and extractive capitalism, as it is about homecoming as an intimate space of learning and orality, of intergenerational bonding, and the emergence of political bodies. Christina Hedlund enters and exits micro-histories, to a backdrop of a rural heritage and migratory biographies, and sends us in reveries of belonging and discipline, flushing out truths and references, painting a landscape in words, sublimating lights, materials and atmospheres. In Molnia Efremov’s searching and research-making through movement and storytelling, ceramics bear witness to migratory dislocations that engender states of fragility while also pushing strengths. Adapted spices, as stories, form objects in movement, visible marks of an anatomy of transformation, and our indispossession binds to matter. Carefully and unhurriedly, Johanna Jansson’s uncanny swag sheds a quest for soul, as she affirms, stretches, and challenges crafts’ place, value.

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5 Magnus Bärtås, Claire Wellesley-Smith, Anette Göthlund, Miro Sazdic.
truth, and discourse. Bringing Tyra Lundgren’s ceramic bird and Dag Hammarskjöld’s narrative embossed on it, Johanna draws between superstition and power, leaving us bare, with questions of authenticity and the potentials imbued in the hand-made. Ita Drew story-tells, evocative and mythical, bordering futurity and the unknown, creating a sonic narrative between ceramics and bodies, fleeting sounds.

(..) Research-creation works to render daily life in the academy more pedagogically, politically, and affectively sustainable, as well as more responsive to issues of social and ecological justice. 8

With this as our guide, we mapped and re-mapped ourselves within our research environments, attempting to understand what kind of research environment we are part of, while making our own. Embracing the moments that could not be mapped, and only point to possibilities of mapping, and the necessity to have moments of opacity without explanation. For that, and for the trust, we want to thank you, Research Lab group.

Konstfack, Research Lab 2022/2023
Roberta Burchardt and matt lambert with

Karolina Janulevičiūtė, Daniela Toledo Escárate, Christina Hedlund, Molnia Efremov, Ita Drew, Johanna Jansson.

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TRANIENT NARRATIVE AND ACTIVATION
BY ITA DREW

SYNOPSIS: ILLUSTRATING EMOTIONAL DIALOGUE THROUGH OBJECTS, COSTUME, INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE

KEY WORDS: TRANSITION, EXCHANGE, ETHEREAL, NARRATIVE

Stories move people in a way unlike other uses of language, they provide a certain kind of knowledge.\(^1\) Stories provoke common emotions such as joy, grief, desire, anger, frustration, and anxiety, duty, obligation, shame and redemption. While such features are the stuff of popular entertainment and everyday conversation, they are also the substrate of age-old myths, epics and scriptures.\(^2\) When we take these ideas into creative practices, we create alluring abstractions that touch the hearts and souls of the participants. There is an invisible exchange within these moments. This thing—that cannot be named, creates an elusive exchange that connects us to a sense of ethereal otherness. It is my duty as a storyteller to find ways in which to invite you into the narrative and evoke shared emotions. Even if the place in which you stand has an essence of newness, it is my obligation as the storyteller to connect with you.

My work begins with the need to explore an emotional journey. I reflect on this need by using song, writing, and illustration. I inform my reflections into my material-based practice and I take myself away from temporal landscapes. The reflections that are held within my mind’s eye begin to take form and become abstractions of the feelings felt. The creation of the work is a way of sharing emotional knowledge. I think of it as a costume, continuous undressing and redressing. As I carefully choose how my materials will inform the narrative, I think about how they will adapt and transform to the space where they will be shown. I don’t always know what the outcome will be when developing the work. What I gain out of my practice is not always understood. Perhaps it shouldn’t be? It is not always the artist’s disposition to understand the full outcome, rather it is to let an idea be born and emerge within the exploration process. What excites me is having a reflective and interrogative approach towards the intent of how my work is activated, and to question what gives agency to the work when performed. I am continually investigating how to make meaningful connections through the process of developing ideas.

\(^1\) Dissanayake, Ellen. Art and Intimacy – How the arts began (University of Washington Press 2012) p.82
\(^2\) Ibid.
In 2009 I saw an illustrative puppet performance of the story of The Lost World at Shunt Gallery performed by a group called The Paper Cinema. That experience was unforgettable and continues to affect me and my practice. I am continually striving to create work that can capture the feeling I experienced at that show. What made it so memorable was the immersive element. Held inside the vaulted underground tunnels that stretch across the entirety of London. We navigated our way through in near darkness, before arriving in an intimate, candlelit tomb. There we watched as the cutout illustrations were passed between and manipulated by two puppeteers. They sat opposite one another with a camera and small stage backdrop. The filmed performance was projected in real time onto the large vaulted wall behind them. The story had no words and was led with live acoustic music. Even though I was only a spectator, the setting invited me into the story. As I watched, the room around me disappeared, and I was lost in the rapture of the story telling. Having these moments of escape are salient in creating connections through art, they allow us to relate to the transcendent importance of people’s experiences. The emotional abstractions within the storytelling become the vessel for the things that cannot always be put into words. Through performance we become enchanted in the narrative’s rhythms; I see it as a way of generating a life force that leads us to a sense of otherworldliness. This sense brings us into ourselves, the people around us and the environment. Within the methodology of my artistic research, I see how artistic creation is a way of discovering invitations and gestures that allow participation. I want them to become part of the narrative and project and channel their own imagination and curiosity, in a way that they begin to form their own relationship to the work. In my reflective practice, I often observe my materials as a way to see how they can become voices of the psyche. I observe how the materials begin to carry themselves, through playful probing, before giving them agency. The object, character or costume I create becomes the intermediary between the participant and the environment. I often use ceramics fired at different temperatures so that they make ethereal sounds and become the carrier of the narrative. The materiality of clay transcends me to ancient human ancestry and activity including the Earth’s creation. The ceramic components in my work become mediators, requesting to be touched or played with.
Like storytelling, the narrative of the work depends on the people’s participation. When it comes to types of performance there are many different perspectives to consider. Within my artistic research practice I think about what are the commonalities of emotions felt in these situations, of when art performs. I wonder what the audience needs to become closer to the work and how do we interact and share the space together. How do my materials contribute to the participant’s immersion? The skinning down of the idea comes from trial and error, I must fail a few times before I make progress. I want to see how materials react to one another. When I think of making costumes, I like to use unconventional materials because their unique qualities are what drive the direction of the practice. They transcend the physical and by extension become the keys to a hidden emotional language that can transport people into the core notion of the narrative.

As I continue to evolve my ideas about how art performs, I ask whether it’s possible to know what the public embodies when the work is presented to them. I document what I observe through journal writing and sound recordings. I want to know what part of the experience gave them permission to become lost or immersed. From the active research comes the possibility to reflect and critique what the experience evoked in them. By creating this dialogue, discussion and observations I can put into practice new ways of representing the work. I develop these transitional experiences by reimagining how the work is presented. I create exhibitions and invite collaboration, which become imperative in understanding the work’s nuances.

In order to create a new representation of emotional artistic outcomes, I focus on the invisible phenomenon of shared intimacy. I think the world needs a sense of magic which allows us to create new pathways of emotional knowledge. Perhaps creative experiences can have an ability to transform how one feels about themselves, including how they choose to continue to present to others. By creating memorable experiences through art, we allow ourselves to transcend past the idea of knowing and are allowed to enjoy the action of not knowing. We become wrapped within the moment of being, and accept that we are part of the story, and the story is not yet told.
We experience things in real time and are part of a greater Myth. In continuation of my practice I will invite mystical passage to ethereal sensibilities, of what it means to share our stories. As we explore how materiality forms a tacit knowledge of instinct, we allow ourselves to surrender our being into the collective experience.
As I am writing this, I’m cooking something that brings back memories: chicken hearts, fried with garlic, on a side of polenta. Garlic carries a lot of memories. It was the main ingredient in many of the dishes my grandmother and my mother made for me when I was little. My hands are rhythmically cutting the garlic while memories of my childhood start flashing before my eyes. Familiar spaces form a contour on top of my reality. When moving to a new culture one is in a state of fragility, forced to find anchor points; the familiar within the unfamiliar. We bring these anchor points with us when we move: recipes we learned from our family, beloved spices, the muscle memory of all the meals we’ve cooked together.

In my research, I interviewed first generation immigrants and among the common themes that keep coming up are cooking as a way of learning, as a way of bonding, and as a way of remembering.

I met choreographer, dancer and cultural worker Amanda Piña while I was taking a course in Expanded choreographic practices at Stockholm Art university. She mentioned that in ancient cultures it is believed that we are made out of everything in the universe. I believe that somehow we carry in our cells the knowledge of our ancestors. I learned how to cook from my mother and grandmother. I don’t remember when I started, but I remember experimenting frequently and failing a lot. I remember helping my grandmother with the Christmas cake every year. I remember making dirty jokes and laughing our arses off. I remember her laughter. Making one of her favorite dishes brings back these memories. Even more now that she is gone. The people that I interviewed all talked about how they bonded with their family through cooking together. Kyoko remembers preparing the dough for udon noodles with her father, by stepping on the dough. Anthemis remembers cooking with her grandmother and writing down her recipes. Bogil remembers his mother making him the traditional birthday soup every year.

The routine of cooking is like a choreography built in time, in a specific place. “Space can be considered as an active participant, an abstract partner.” ¹ We learned from our parents and grandparents

who in turn learned from their elders. This repetition moves from generation-to-generation until it lands with us in the present. It becomes a choreography in progress, each generation improves and adapts the movement to their own spirit. All of this is what we take with us when we move to another culture. We also have to adapt our habits and the use of things to a new context. As Sarah Ahmed says, “Use is both how an organism receives a message from the environment about what it needs as well as how an organism is directed to act in particular ways.”

When I was in the process of connecting to my making, and to the material, through using my whole body as a tool I went back to what I’ve learned and discovered with the Skinner releasing technique, led by artist, dancer, and choreographer Florence Peake, which explores the relationship between physicality and materiality. During the workshop we experimented with the relation between our bodies and a body of clay. It made me reflect on my relationship to the material I am working with: porcelain. After my previous project I felt such a disconnection from it, caused in part by the slip-casting technique I was using, which is the industrial way of producing large series via plaster molds. In that process my interaction with the material was minimal. To strengthen my connection with the porcelain I’m using different parts of my body to form the various pieces. I am making while I listen to the interviews, and watching the movement of their hands while they make their favorite dishes. I’m using the rolling pin to make thin sheets of porcelain. It is the same rolling pin that is used in baking. I’m pushing the material to the extreme, testing to see how thin I can make it before it breaks. Just like we, the immigrants, are pushed to fit the mold of the new culture, our identity thinned out to the edge of breaking. As the cracks start to appear, I care for them, caressing them with a damp sponge or brush. As the porcelain sheet lies on my body as a second skin, I feel every stroke of the sponge. As I tend to the material I simultaneously take care of myself. Some cracks are mendable but some stay, as a reminder of the struggle to adapt.

2 Ahmed, Sarah. What’s the use, 73
The practice of copying a painting on canvas has been done for at least 150 years. It was called oil-print, a lithographic print that was varnished as a way to sell popular motifs to working class households. I have a couple of these kinds of prints from my grandmother’s home. One is of a sailor’s wife on the shore of a wild sea, another is a couple, perhaps royalty, a king, and his queen. Why would someone like to have them on the wall of their home? A kind of guardian? Idolatry?

These kinds of paintings were not to be found with my father’s ancestors. His grandfather was a forest Finn, a people from Finland, masters in the craft of burning as a special kind of agricultural practices and then harvesting rye from the burnt down forest. They were invited to settle in the desolate forest of Sweden in the 16th century. Once settled they were an independent group, with their own language and superstitions until the forests were purchased by big companies and the forest-Finn’s way of life came to an end.

My heritage is wholly rural, self-owned forest peasants cunning with all sorts of natural material: wool, linen, metal, and wood. They were people who were in close relationship with horses and cows and who hunted bears, hares, and elk. I grew up in the countryside, and I owe a lot of my happiness to this background and these people.

As a painter I find pleasure in creating meaning from the raw material of life itself: pleasure and pain, ambiguity, and the perplexity of the world, and the sensuality of pigments and fabric. I thrive in a sense of wonder at what happens as one color meets another. Art as a cultural sphere became known to me as a young teenager. Seeing a van Gogh painting at the National Gallery in London made a strong impression. In contrast, there lived and worked a landscape painter, Martin Bodell, in my home village. He also repaired and repainted old wooden furniture. His paintings were found in every home. His work was local and affordable. Not that I identified with him. I set out to study weaving and sewing before I got hooked on painting.
On a tour to Krakow and Berlin 1978 I became aware of the horrific crimes of the holocaust at Dachau-Birkenau, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz. A blow to my understanding of humanity, a blow that grew as I learned about colonial crimes in Namibia and South Africa.

I did not find the Stockholm art scene all that welcoming, but there was plenty of initiative taken by artists like the Walda group to exhibit in temporary abandoned spaces, and this became my track. I did not consider myself talented enough but my drive to paint was unquestionable, the practice brings me energy and is my life force. The “Die Neuen Wilden” shown at Moderna Museet, brought new life into painting, by then sidestepped by conceptual art. Art is not the accomplishment of “higher” existence, whether conceived mentally or spiritually, but is an elaboration of the most primitive and elementary fragments of an ancient animal prehistory. 1

Julian Schnabel, one of Die Neuen Wilden, made a wonderful film on Vincent van Gogh by the way.

At this time, mid nineteeneighties, in a passionate and complex love relation, I found solace in Juan de la Cruz, Libro de la noche oscura, a spiritual reading of my circumstances. I had visited Rome and Bernini’s Santa Teresa in Chiesa Santa Maria della Vittoria made an opening toward this spiritual direction. I studied the History of Religion at Stockholm University and suddenly the whole world opened before me. Religion and art are traditionally connected, and today both are still ways of understanding oneself in the world.

Seven years of art-education, practical and theoretical, connected me with people struggling like me, my life as an artist has not been a lonely path. Born at the right time in a wealthy country has enabled me to do what I want to do. Living on the margins has been manageable and my drive for painting has the deepest possible roots.

Slash and burn, Masters of Burning, yes, absolutely, and possibly the animal within us is the origin of art making? Recognized in Elisabeth Grosz’s book chaos, territory, art an abundance of proof: the making of art and music belongs to all humankind not just to elite culture. Quality may vary depending on the socio-economics of time and material available but that quality of sensation is to be found in the cave-paintings of AltaMira and elsewhere in our deep human past. Some art is highly valued and worth millions on the market, it is the making of capitalism and mimetism. “Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.” 2

I could have done better, worked harder to be included in the art-scene of prestigious galleries. My way has been at my own pace, taking my time to study whatever I desire and am curious about, astronomy, Arabic and philosophy.

Translating my paintings into words is not my aim. For me, painting is a pre-verbal expression, another way of thinking and feeling and having a meaningful life. The cartesian grip “I think therefore I am” has been left behind, overcome by further thinking. By taking feeling as the overarching category for human mentality and consciousness, with radical thinking as subcategory, American philosopher Susanne Langer placed embodied meaning and experience at the heart of human understanding and existence.

I will try to acknowledge what kind of decisions I make while painting and what knowledge I rely on. There is a need for excitement and surprises, at a slow pace. It takes time and contemplation to become aware of opportunities and make choices. I sit down and wait. At some point, a color suggests itself. A plateau of boredom and disbelief may be needed somewhere late in the process. Maybe the painting has become too ordered? Where patience is running out, aggressive action develops. A destructive mood I have come to maneuver and make use of—it is not that I give up, I remake.

What does it mean to paint?

For me, painting is life sustaining. To paint I need to be relaxed and momentarily free of the weight of other duties pressing upon me. I need time and space for the paintings to emerge at their own pace. I need at least a week of undisturbed work time, preferably two weeks, but as soon as the process is well on its way I am safe and I can handle disturbances. I prefer to work when the studio is emptied of earlier works, my canvases are prepared and my color pots are full. Space must be cleared for the not yet-formulated to make itself visible, and I rely on my intuition and emotions of the day.

I begin with allowing myself the pleasure of spreading brilliant colors onto a row of canvases, using waving or circular strokes in all directions, creating rhythm and music without sound. All pleasure and happiness.

The next day the paint will have dried and I continue with a new layer, complicating things, and in the process the canvases become differentiated from one another. Every day new layers are added, and new forms appear. A workable chaos has been created, or found? Now is the time to contemplate, waiting for a color pigment or a form to suggest itself.

I am not thinking but rather I make use of my heart, and a feeling emerges. The whole surface should be alive, some paint must be rubbed away. By now each canvas has to be treated individually, they all have their different faces and flaws, and I must decide whether to continue adding forms and colors or subtracting. Excitement is at hand: now is the time to dive into the unknown. My body is the place of streaming, balancing, dancing, crying, and cracking up. There is turmoil, and the longer I can stand it the better. When I’m too quick to get the painting in shape, it may fail, become flat and I must start over again. I have to once again get access to that fertile turmoil. There is a plateau of work, it takes time to figure out what to do next, desperation at times. I put the painting away and look again in a few months, half a year, or ever longer. With eyes and feelings fresh from rest, hopefully something new, something until now unseen has appeared. I may finish the painting, sometimes after only a few days. I will have my moment of contentment. To paint means to be prepared and open to anything as it appears on the canvas. From where? To paint is to be alive.

My first choices are about size, format, and canvas quality. On a rough canvas uncountable layers of egg tempera, my preferred medium, can be applied. If working on a canvas size bigger than 1x1m I usually work many layers for a long time, I use oil-based pigments on top, as by many layers of tempera the colors disappear, all will be black.

I don’t use sketches. The canvas is my playground, with no top and no bottom. The painting is like a rolling wheel, and it grows darker and more serious by the week. On the watch for appealing, fruitful shapes I might choose to highlight, the more findings the more changes I make by colors and shapes. Using small brushes, I dive into details. In the end my painting must come down to One whole and at some point a decision must be made about the top-bottom orientation. I choose what is the most surprising to me, something I didn’t see before, something workable.

What is burning?

Every summer I return to the landscape of my childhood: mountains, deep forests, lakes, streams, and farmland. Me and my siblings were given, from Greta, my mother’s aunt, the schoolhouse where we grew up. It is close to the farmhouse of my grandfather, Emanuel. I take joy in the sunlight transforming every corner of the house, and watching how it changes spaces through light and dark, the sun riding the sky through almost the whole night of June.

In August, the foggy dawn, humid nights and I am happy to see the moon again and the starry sky. I am a citizen of the unknown, everlasting universe. I have a long forest history through the lives of my relatives and ancestors. My father was running the family sawmill, we were all products of the forest. Exploitation nowadays is saddening but there are many forest farmers who care for their land, their animals, and their hunting grounds. People who live
close to nature are few nowadays. Ever since the forests became an important resource for steam engines in the mid-seventeenth century, big companies lured and bought the forestland from poor farmers who became workers in huge sawmills instead. The same history everywhere, industrialisation and the rule of capitalism: added value. The dark side now is apparent, we are wasting way too much, killing the Beauty of nature with our comfortable, illusionary lives. Without the accumulated wealth, would I have become a painter? Or worn out at 73 years old like Marta and Emma, my grandmothers? I live now and the earth is burning.

Cyprus,
Salamis Hotel Famagusta
March 1st, 2023

I am in Cyprus to place myself, my body, at the ground of Aija Irini, the landscape and field of the findings, the huge Swedish collection of sculptures from Cyprus, I want to have an impression of the site.

Preparations for the tourist season are happening, the changing of mattresses, the clearing out of new parking lots. Just a few cafés along the beach have opened and yet the weather is all sunny and +18°C before 9 o’clock in the morning.

My travel company has the business-idea of renting rooms during off-season for lower prices. At Salamis Hotel sandy beaches and the clear turquoise sea. Tourism is the industry in Turkish Cyprus, new sky-high hotels are being built along the sandy beaches, Real Estate companies are selling land and private properties.

The British at first rented Cyprus from the Ottomans in 1878. In 1914 Cyprus became part of the British Empire under military occupation, and a colony from 1925–1960. It was during British colonization that a group of Swedish archeologists got permission to excavate at Aija Irini, farming land in the northwest of Cyprus.

By then, excavating and looting was happening all over Cyprus. The door to the grave chamber of Tutankhamun, Egypt, had been opened and excavated in 1922 and excitement for new findings was high. The 1929 Swedish expedition in Cyprus were lucky to encounter Papa Prokopios, a priest in Kyrene who offered a gift to the expedition—a small terracotta head, the shape and character depicted suggesting it was antique. With no time to lose, the expedition started digging and soon found an old sanctuary (700 B.C). It was filled with terracotta sculptures depicting men of different professions, animals, and a few women, all situated facing an altar.

Negotiations were made and the Swedes were allowed to bring more than half of the findings home to Stockholm, the rest are at the museum of archeology in Nicosia.
During my years as a museum host at Medelhavsmuseet, I became acquainted and familiar with these figures, in my mind both imposing and welcoming. The Aija Irini figures are robed and many of them wear caps and have facial expressions, mostly happy smiles and a hand raised as if greeting someone, in my mind they are greeting me. I took this as an invitation to go see their original home. Unexpectedly my travel company offered a tour to the countryside to meet farmers making Halloumi cheese out of a mix of goat and cow milk, combined with a visit to the site of the Aija Irini excavation. There is an iron fence around the site but once inside you can walk down the old overgrown pits. The landscape is silent farmland, low trees as the sea is just half a mile away. No hotels at this northwest coast, all peaceful: a sanctuary.
There is something magical and mysterious about the art of ceramic objects. These creations of earth, water, fire, and air have the ability to captivate our imagination and evoke deep emotions. When it comes to ceramic birds, in many cultures, people imagine there is a special kind of power that they hold – the power of truth.

The use of birds and bird motifs can be found widely spread around the world. “Birds, representing the spirits of stars, are embroidered on small German amulet bags worn round the neck and enclosing birch bark. In China it is the oriental phoenix that is a charm against illness and misfortune, while the Indian peacock guarantees fertility. Both the dove and cock have long been associated with talismanic power: tiny bronze amulets of doves have been found in prehistoric graves in Bosnia. While the dove now symbolizes peace, the cock was always a solar symbol: its crowing chases away the evil spirits of the night and announces the rising of the sun. Wooden cocks and doves top the gables of many houses in Eastern Europe, and are also carved above doorways and on crucifixes and graves.”

I first came across a story about birds when I was working at economist and diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld’s Backåkra Museum, in southern Sweden. Hammarskjöld owned a ceramic bird, made by Swedish artist Tyra Lundgren, that he kept in his United Nations Office in New York when he worked as the Secretary General. He turned the bird towards his visitors when he felt they weren’t telling him the truth. The bird, with its intense eyes, would make them tell the truth. The story is told to visitors at Backåkra, sourced from an account by one of his living relatives.

My project is an exploration of the power of handcrafted bird sculptures. It addresses the questions I’ve asked thus far and wonders if birds can take on a new dimension, becoming magical objects that have the power to encourage people to speak the truth. Can a ceramic bird inhabit magical or spiritual power from creation, or is it transformed into an uncanny talisman by its user or maker? How about the birds’ own perspective?

Through this work in progress, I aim to generate a spiritual atmosphere in which to problematize craft, shift perspective towards a deeper personal sense for myself and the viewer and have intentions to make the abstract more tangible. I believe objects can be enchanted by history and embedded in different layers.

In a previous career as appraiser, I used my senses – touch, sight and intangible qualities – together with my knowledge, to piece together the history and value of an object. Throughout my life, from a young age, I have had in my possession an expressive bird charcoal drawing by Lena Svedberg with big, dark, wise eyes, given to me by my beloved grandparents. It has a strong presence in my life and is the embryo of this project. I find myself drawn to animism and intend to explore this path further whilst remaining aware of appropriation. Ontology and hauntology are also readings to be made.

In many homes, these beautiful sculptures of birds, often in ceramics, are placed in prominent positions where they can be seen and admired. The presence of the ceramic bird can encourage people to be open and honest, as if they are being watched over by a spiritual guardian, as it is said that it can inspire them to speak truthfully and from the heart.

Throughout history, birds have been seen as messengers between the earthly realm and the spirit world. Appearing in folk-tales in many cultures, birds are symbolic of freedom, as they can soar the skies and cover vast distances. When transformed into ceramic sculptures, birds can take on a new dimension, and become powerful talismans. Did Dag’s bird have the power to encourage people to speak the truth, or perhaps frighten someone into telling the truth? Or is it something about the object, the properties of the handmade? Is it the symbol of the bird, or something about its wise eyes?

Is the ceramic bird a magical object from the beginning? Or is it transformed into a talisman by its user or maker, or both? Do you need to be spiritual to feel the power? Does the object project its user’s spirit? Could it be made of another material, for example glass, which also holds magical, amorphous qualities? Do you need to own it, or can it be borrowed? Is it the ritual itself, or in a combination of factors?

In Egypt and in the Nordic countries, the bird as an object or depicted in a painting can symbolize magical power and properties. In various cultures, it is often believed that birds can bring messages from ancestors on the other side.

“One bird – apart from the owl – is outstanding in the realm of magic, and that is the eagle. King of birds, is a symbol of victory and of power, particularly for the North American Indian, whose warriors used eagles’ feathers as amulets and to symbolize valour.”

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Perhaps the truth-telling power of ceramic birds is not just a matter of superstition. Can the intricate details and textures of these sculptures have a calming effect on the brain, reducing stress levels and encouraging a person to be more open and honest? To take this into consideration is also one aim of this project.

Do some objects have a soul, and what do they tell us? How can we listen? What will we hear?

Ceramic craft birds are more than just beautiful works of art. They have the power to inspire people to speak the truth, encouraging them to be open and honest, and providing a calming influence in their lives. But as a contrast, people can also be intimidated by the fearful looking bird, frightened by it or the ceremony they might be partaking in, in order to tell the truth. Whether displayed in a ceremony or in a home, these sculptures are talismans of truth, and a testament to the power of ceramics to connect us to the natural world, and to our deepest selves. In a world of uncertainty and growing distrust – can this magical object be a small contribution for a better world?
The agency that the ordinary garment has is infinite. A piece of tailored textile becomes a tool for empowerment activated through references, and cultural and collective history. With the power it has, a garment or a combination of garments, translate narratives and manifest ideas that are intertwined in all human experience.

In the film *The Cassandra Cat* (dir. Vojtěch Jasný, 1963) ¹, the Magician asks the teacher, Robert, who he would like to be [dress like]. Ghenghis Khan? Columbus? Robert responds that he would prefer something not military, more ordinary. “Like this,” he points at himself. In a snap of the Magician’s finger, an outfit identical to what Robert is wearing appears on a hanger: a white collared shirt, a grey woolen v-neck sweater, and loosely cut casual pants. The Magician declares, “Our costumes are like finity and infinity in the universe. What universe would you prefer, finite or infinite?” (Jasný, 1963, 0:33:40)

In the scene, the appearance of three complete garments swinging into view on a wire hanger reminded me of a scarecrow (liet. baidyklė). Particularly, the scarecrows I am familiar with seeing, marking the fields belonging to individual farmers in rural areas of Lithuania. I wonder, “What makes the humanoid attire of western clothes so scary for birds?” The business of the navy cardigan? The negligence of a loosely hung tie? The uniformity of a casual button-down shirt? Or the importance of a denim messenger bag? Or is it the positioning of these garments within a field of maturing crops?

Throughout history and across many cultures, scarecrows were a symbolic worship to harvest gods, like Priapus in Ancient Greece. Their god-like, monumental appearance was assuring both for good harvest and for scaring birds off the vineyards. In Japanese mythology, the deity Kuebiko appears in the rice fields, believed to have comprehensive awareness yet not able to walk. In medieval Germany, wooden scarecrows resembling witches ushered in the beginning of spring. A similar tradition in Lithuania, is activated on

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The clothed scarecrow is globally understood and recognizable. Yet, for me, a garment-maker, the scarecrow offers the potential to speculate about garments as subjects. The scarecrow becomes a witness to a process wherein I frame my own creative practice within layers of complicated remains, while also undoing what has been expected from me in fashion education. It acts as a metaphor, decentering the fixated focus on production as a method to continuously create collections of products, extracting creativity to validate one’s own worth as a designer. By shifting the focus onto garments and narratives captured within them, it manifests the Užgavenės festival at the end of February, followed by Pelėnų diena (eng. Ash Wednesday) and fasting (lent) till spring. Central to the festival is the wish to kick the winter out. This is celebrated by multiple activities and traditions, the main one is burning the Morė doll — a female fertility deity made from wood and hay, dressed in fabric — turning it into ash.2 Since ash was used in fields as a fertilizer, the act of burning was meant to bring a great harvest for the upcoming season.

Other ongoing festival traditions include the act of dressing up. People painted their cheeks with beetroot juice and used coal to enhance the darkness of their hair, eyebrows, mustache, or beard. They wore jarring hand-made wooden masks, traditionally crafted by cobblers and wood workers of the village, sometimes working on them for months before the celebration. Men wore fur coats and pants inside out, women wore multiple skirts, and often clothing was worn in acts of cross-gendering. Some people dressed up in a manner that maintained their anonymity, to trick their neighbors or friends. The dressed-up groups went from house to house in their village singing, and eating what each household offered. It was an important part of the tradition to eat well and be full.

People commonly chose to dress up as an exaggerated and uglified version of symbolic cultural characters (for example, kanapinis (eng. hemp-man), lašininis (eng. lard-man).3 Some would dress up as local ethnic minorities of Jewish and Roma people, who were living between the city and rural communities. Others would dress as farm animals, mythical creatures such as devil, witch or reaper (liet. velnias, ragana, giltinė). The act of dressing in ordinary clothes to appear outrageous, funny or scary, diminishes the bleakness and fatigue of deep winter, and is a manifestation towards a prosperous season ahead.

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2 Morė as a name is most common in Northern Lithuania, whereas other areas name it Gavėnas, Ciuccela or Kotrė.
3 The two characters are always pitted against one another in a challenge. Hemp-man, just like hemp plant, is tall, lean and strong, whereas its antagonist lard-man is short, fat and weak. Hemp-man always wins.
a space to self-actualize, giving me a voice for my eternal curiosity about dressing. The reorganization happens without seeking permission and with clarity that disciplines are just notches showing connections within layers, but it is the authenticity to one’s values that makes the process whole.

The scarecrow jacket is not reproducible nor replicable by default, as it uses two pre-existing garments and limited leftover material as its only source and supply. The ordinary here becomes one-of-a-kind, is worn yet not sold. A scarecrow is not a statement, but it stands its ground overviewing the field. Perhaps it appears lonely but more so it potentially appears as manifestation as a dressed body with a kind of un-bodily presence. The un-bodily is a vacancy, where the research vibrates beyond decisions about methodology and structure. Garments sliced in gestures and combined with hopes for the future embody what the scarecrow could wear, even if nobody ever considered designing for them. The scarecrow allows me as a garment-maker to slip into and further wonder about garments as matter, sometimes the garment is part of us, yet other times they are completely separate markers of narratives and identities.
‘Behind every woman is the image of the ‘ideal home’. The ideology of domesticity, which describes how things ought to be and ought to look, will always affect what we do even when we are reacting against it.’

Crafts have often been thought of as being associated with the extraordinary, the unusual and the highly skilled, but what if we remember that crafts arise as part of the ordinary?

I had to restart this text. In fact, I am making it all over again. It feels like a metaphor for these months as part of Research Lab. I feel the need to address this un-learning because it reminds me of Slavoj Žižek’s description of an event as “the effect that seems to exceed its causes.” I understand his definition as such: changing, transformative, brutal, undeniable. As such—quoting Natalie Loveless’s *How to Make Art at the End of the World*—“an invaluable starting point,” I take this as a new standing ground for my practice as a designer.

Creation as a survival mechanism

Being part of the quotidian is one virtue of textile crafts, as textiles are so deeply intertwined with human life that they seem ever-present and invisible at the same time. This invisibility is what drew me to research *Virado* in the first place. Why are there no traces or record of a ubiquitous technique that arises almost anywhere sewing machines and pattern-making are involved? *Virado* roughly translates as “reversed,” the practice is even mentioned as the ‘inside-out’ in Kate Fletcher’s *Craft of Use*. But what makes *Virado* so unique?

*Virado* is the local Chilean name given to the textile reutilization technique where a garment is turned inside out and then worn as a new piece with minimal to no alterations in the garment’s original shape. I became fascinated with a family anecdote of my

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grandmother’s own experience with reversing a coat. I was even more fascinated with the fact that there is little to no documentation of this technique. The only testimonies of its existence are the oral histories from people who knew about the technique and perhaps used it. These oral histories are my initial approach to researching Virado, as I’m certain there is more to the technique than just the garments. I interviewed my grandmother, Ube, and asked her to join me in my first attempts to reverse a jacket. I documented these meetings at her house in sunny Santiago and hopefully set a foundation for a longer research that has already opened many more edges than what I expected.

I began this project as a way of documenting virado as a technique, but also to honour my grandmother who is instrumental in my creative identity. Because Virado was, like Boro, a “poor person’s tool,” it was a secret. According to Ube, it was better not to tell anyone about it, or maybe the others would realise you can’t afford new garments. Per her accounts, the technical challenge my grandmother saw as a young garment maker was an embarrassment for others who saw their ragged clothes as a sign of undesirability at a time when only wealthy people could afford more than four suits in their closets.

The “Anthropocene-aware” era we live in has brought in new paradigms not only for the fashion industry, but for the entire manufacturing chain as we know it. This shift to scarcity as the norm might be explained in, for instance, the Japanese origins of Boro, associated with the concept of Mottainai, meaning not to waste. Boro textiles emerged from pure necessity, they reflect Japanese society in several aspects, even the “notion of circularity” that comes from the deep sense of care of Mottainai, and the ingenuity that made Boro possible. But Boro was also “a sign of poverty… something shameful” and today its visual expression serves as an inspiration for fashion brands to signify upcycling. Boro illustrates

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7 Ibid., p.8

8 Ibid., p.5-6

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the appropriation of poverty and creation as a survival mechanism. It conjures the questions: who is able to acknowledge scarcity as a mode of living in its wholeness, as opposed to its appropriation as a fashion statement? Is design interested in transmitting these, in the words of Birgit Haehnel, modes of creation coming from “seemingly exotic symbols of other cultures” or only extracting them to create a new range of certified products that comply with this “new order” of manufacturing where design sits? 9

The alms that put an end to the technique

A crucial question when trying to understand [Virado’s] history in Chilean society, is to problematize it by asking when second-hand clothing is sustainable, and when it becomes, in Ube’s words, “alms?” According to my grandmother, the first time she saw second-hand clothing sold as a cheaper alternative to unworn garments in Santiago de Chile was between 1974 – 1975. She recalls people trying to persuade others not to go inside the warehouse where the garments were being sold. She even recalls a person saying, “these are alms they are throwing at us.” The idea that second-hand clothing was a half-hearted offering of charity, makes the use of the term alms no coincidence. According to the February 2023 “Trashion” report in Changing Markets, “Sorting at the source is failing, as it results in exporting companies skimming off the high-quality clothing for resale in Europe, while the rest is sent outside its borders.” 10

The textile-craft ecosystem that was booming in 1968, was dampened by the installation of the dictatorship in 1973. 11 By 1975, there was indeed a crisis caused by the introduction of “shock politics” that impacted the network of practitioners who kept [Virado] alive, not only tailors and seamstresses but also the existing supplies network, already affected by the military coup in 1973. 12 But what happens when you introduce cheaper garments into this market?

12 Ibid., p.212

This is a question I wasn’t expecting to develop into an important part of my research, but I couldn’t help but wonder if second-hand clothing is just a way of keeping developed countries’ consciences clean. Isn’t this the definition of an almsgiver? While alms are supposed to relieve the affects of poverty, this same relief might entail a dark business that privileges same-border customers and treats the rest of the world just as that, the rest? Still, it is a conducting thread that goes way back to what Simon Schama refers to as “the embarrassment of riches,” which could be perfectly used for today’s greenwashing. 13

Standardisation and reproducibility vs. the ordinary woman

I always say I grew up in a furniture factory because we were so intrinsically linked to it through my father, and his father before him, that it became part of my identity. I studied industrial design, probably motivated by my father’s factory and my experience in it. With my grandmother, her influence in my future design practice was a different thing. Despite having a bold character, Ube didn’t want to impose her craft on anyone. She said she thought it was “too ordinary.” Her sewing machine was always a part of the landscape at my grandparents’ house. I suspect this happens with many of us, whether we choose to involve ourselves in any making practice or not. All these happenings—around garment and furniture-making, the domesticity and mundanity of the crafts around me—shaped my vision of creativity and how one should conduct a so-called creative life. Then came design.

As I said, I was probably motivated to study design while growing up surrounded by machines and materials. One of the first things I learned when entering the industrial design world was that it was a cis-men’s world, and you must comply, and surrender to it. Design is, by definition, an extractor of features in everyday activities. A designer takes one thing, observes it, extracts it, turns it into something repeatable, and then tests it, and tests it again. A designer is asked to draw one hundred shapes, take one, select,
slice, splice, test, and so on as they turn on their exceptionality radar. This research is not about that, although, I did try to turn it into that before redirecting course. Perhaps my industrial designer side shows in my obsession with and tendency for repetition and serialisation. This research is about the ordinary, specifically what Virginia Woolf calls “the ordinary woman,” as I believe design has overlooked the ordinary for too long. Moreover, I am returning to a vision I forgot I had, which was given to me by growing up among these crafts and how exceptionally ordinary they were.

Embracing the “falleness” of crafts

Craft is the most accessible form of art, and as such, it is a vehicle to influence people. Craft is also fragile and highly political. According to the Chilean historian Pía Montalva, 1976 is the landmark year for imports of second-hand clothing. It is due to the recently installed economic model which, despite a lingering crisis, starts to slowly permeate everyday lives with “effects that will only be dimensioned with the passage of time”. She notes this new retail business model (second-hand clothing) advertises itself as something that allows people to “exercise their ability to choose.” Isn’t this always the argument? More choices, more freedom, and then you end up saturating a system and we go back to receiving alms.

So, the argument for Virado as a craft is not about nostalgia, but about ownership, and about how, by being a silent witness of the past, Virado becomes a testimony of what should not be lost and what aspects we should consider when designing new products. For example to ask, paraphrasing Holly McQuillan, what materials are more appropriate to endure longer? In this sense, crafts offer an invaluable opportunity to experience what Žižek notes as Maitemindu the Basque word meaning “to be injured by love.” I understand this as surrendering oneself to the precipice of slowness while claiming back the ordinary.

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14 In the essay ‘Women and Fiction’ (1929), Woolf explains why there is no space or enough recognition of what she calls “the ordinary woman”, as opposed to “the extraordinary woman, who can write novels and take on creative endeavours” thanks to her living conditions. Woolf, Virginia, and Michèle Barrett. Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing: Introduced by Michèle Barrett. London: The Women’s Press, 1979, p.44
15 Montalva, Pia, p.268
16 Ibid., p.270
18 Žižek, Slavoj, p.8
ROBERT A BURCHARDT
I am a Brazilian researcher, artist-writer, lecturer, mentor, editor and cultural worker, based in Sweden and Brazil. I work with materiality from the perspective of a colonial object and its polyphonic imaginaries, in a bordering field, between material culture, literature, philosophy and politics, with autoethnographic and decolonial grounds. Generating intimate convivialities and an affective practice, I am concurrently active in different positions and environments, some recently being: PhD candidate HGK FHNW, CH; tutor Decolonizing Architecture, Royal Institute of Art, SWE; guest senior lecturer Research Lab, Konstfack, SWE; speaker Groundings, Linnaeus University; speaker Archival Interactions: Performing Intersectional Counter-Archives, Research Center for Material Culture and Maastricht University, NLD; speaker Home in a monument, Estonian Academy of Arts; 2021 curator/coordinator Autumn Open Studios, Spring Open Studios and co-editor Urgent Pedagogies, IASPIS, The Swedish Arts Grants Committee; co-editor and contributor Architectural Dissonances, L’Internationale Online; and speaker Heritage and Decoloniality, UNIGE – Geneva School of Social Sciences with University of Exeter.

ADRIANE DALTON
Adriane Dalton is an artist, writer, and arts-educator based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is Editor-in-Chief of Metalsmith magazine published by SNAG (Society of North American Goldsmiths), and a past contributor to Art Jewelry Forum’s online magazine.

Over the past fifteen years, her studio practice has evolved from traditional jewelry and enameling techniques to incorporate alternative and recycled materials. Lately, she is using disused and discarded materials to engage the intersections of labor, class, gender, and consumption. Her work has been exhibited at Westobou Gallery (Augusta, GA), The Greater Denton Arts Council (Denton, TX), Contemporary Craft (Pittsburgh, PA), The Visual Arts Center of Richmond (Richmond, VA), The Wayne Art Center (Wayne, PA), Snyderman-Works Gallery (Philadelphia, PA), A CASA Museu de Object Brasileiro (São Paulo, Brazil), the Metal Museum (Memphis, TN), and Space 1026 (Philadelphia, PA).

ITA DREW
Drew is a multidisciplinary artist who creates unique perspectives through performance. Often using ceramics as her main material, Drew creates a break in tradition by using the material in unconventional ways: through objects, costume, sound and installation. Exploring narratives and ways to tell stories that link us to the more ethereal aspects of being, the work invites its audience to participate, and through this exchange a connection is made. Drew likes to examine how different spaces affect the way people interact with the work, including how the work itself can be used as a vessel to engage within the environment.

MOLNIA EFREMOV
Molnia Efremov is a half russian half romanian crafter based in Stockholm. She has a master in craft from Konstfack and she is currently finishing an after master course at Konstfack, Research lab and a course at Stockholm University of the Arts, Stuff: Expanded choreography practices. Besides craft she has a background in interior design, dance and improvisational theater among other things. The variety of her skills helps her experiment with new ways of expression.

CHRISTINA HEDLUND
I graduated from Konstfack Stockholm, department of Art 1981 and since then I have been exhibiting in galleries, museums, and other locations. Gave birth to a son 1989 and to support ourselves got a part time job at Etnografiska Museet Stockholm, an anthropological museum. After the museum was incorporated in “The Museums of World culture” 2002, I worked also in the house of Asian antiques and the museum of Mediterranean cultures.

JOHANNA JANSSON
Johanna Jansson is a craft artist whose work ranges from glass design to audio and landscape work. Johanna has studied both at Stockholm’s Konstfack University of the Arts (BA in Crafts and Design), London’s Royal College of Arts (MA in Fine Arts) and the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm. She has exhibited her work at The Great Exhibition in Hyde Park London, BIGG Selected in Chicago, Liljevalchs Vârsalong in Stockholm, Vessel Gallery in London and Ebeltoft Glass Museum in Denmark.
KAROLINA JANULEVIČIŪTĖ
Karolina Janulevičiūtė is a Lithuanian artist and garment-maker based in Stockholm, Sweden. In her practice, she conducts artistic research focusing on the garment as a subject to guide a narrative on Baltic Sea region identity, memory and wardrobe as a method for insight into how garments are entangled into our biographies.

matt lambert
matt lambert is a non-binary, trans, multidisciplinary collaborator and co-conspirator working towards equity, inclusion, and reparation. Their practice is based in polydisciplinamory, entangling making, writing, curating, collaborating, and performing. lambert is currently a PhD candidate at Konstfack, University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, Sweden, in philosophy in artistic practice in visual, applied and spatial arts. They teach multiple levels within the Konstfack CRAFT! department. lambert collaborates with multi-media artists of a vast array of disciplines to reconfigure the current cultural systems of queerness and body politics while challenging the boundaries of craft. Their research focuses on possible mappings of collaborative movements with craft through a developed methodology of cruising. Craft in this research is approached as a way of looking and living that is learned through material or process specificities, but not contained by them. This is being investigated through a polydisciplinamory practice. The practice of polydiscipliamory is in reference to Natalie Loveless’s work, which decenters disciplinary specificity and instead asks for new ways to tell stories and create new research literacies in the university, while still being able to transmit knowledge in equivalence to disciplinary specific research.

DANIELA TOLEDO ESCÁRATE
Daniela Toledo Escárate (she/her) is a Chilean industrial designer with an MA in Material Futures from Central Saint Martins. She has lived and worked in Chile, England, Germany, and China and now resides in Sweden. Her research is broad as she experiments with the tension between the old, the new and the future shock. She is interested in how crafts influence contemporary manufacturing techniques and how we can better understand materials through crafts and their origins in everyday life, as well as feminine crafts and the lack of documentation around them in the domestic space.


Bindokienė - Bražytė, Danutė. *Lietuvių papročiai ir tradicijos.* Lithuanian Customs and traditions. Chicago, 1989


AS AN UNINTENTIONALLY FORMED GROUP OF PRACTITIONERS AND INTENTIONAL GROUP OF RESEARCHERS FROM VARIOUS DISCIPLINES, WE WERE BROUGHT TOGETHER BY CURIOSITY. WE WANT TO OFFER EVERYONE A BITE OF THAT INTRIGUE THAT LED US THROUGH THE FIELD OF CRAFT THIS YEAR.