How to: Use Craft as an Everyday Intervention of Joy

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Abstract

This paper questioned how we could utilise feelings of joy, specifically those within a craft context, as a tool of intervention in everyday life.

I explored using craft, both in its making and experiencing, as a means for carrying joy into the daily life of the public, thereby increasing well-being and potentially acting as a catalyst for change. I argued the importance of joy in our lives, as well as the need for public accessibility to art and craft.

I wanted to use this paper to draw focus on the value I place upon somatic engagement of the body, specifically when we engage with craft, art and our everyday lives. I believe that by centring the experience of the body and educating about the importance of somatics, we can explore a different methodology for engaging with our everyday environments. I argued somatic understanding is critical, as it allows us to move from a purely cognitive understanding to one that is experiential, thereby creating a more accessible and inclusive framework for creating and understanding art and craft.

Keywords: craft, ceramics, nerikomi, joy, somatics, experiential, public accessibility, everyday life.
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Introduction

‘Moments of joy are simple and immediate – we often associate joy with children, who are more open to wonder and delight than adults. How, then, to bring those straightforward, playful peaks of delight into our lives?’

(Franklin and Till, 2022, p.6.)

The biggest question for me is how I can use craft as an intervention, to bring joy into the daily lives of the public. The question posed above therefore seems a fitting introduction and will be what I explore and try to answer through this essay.

I am going to discuss how I think this can be done, using a combination of theories, tools and methods relating to joy, somatics, everyday aesthetics, public space and accessibility. I’ve written this text as an instruction manual, an idea that came to me when my question began with ‘how to’ and that by following these steps, anyone could be able to find the joy I set about to create. Of course, it’s not an exact guide, rather, that these are the key ingredients I have identified as necessary in order to intervene and create daily moments of joy.

I work primarily with ceramics, creating domestic-ware such as mugs, furniture and tiles which can built and collaged together to form site specific installations. Clay is the fundamental material through which I learn and create, but the past couple of years I have used my time at Konstfack to also experiment with flocking, tufting and wallpaper printing.

Ultimately, it’s always through clay and ceramics, that I imagine, make and feel. I rarely plan ahead in terms of design and if I do it’s very loose. Instead, I begin working with my material, learning and discovering through and with it.

However, everything I create relates back to these aforementioned ideas – of bringing joy to the everyday and creating an experience and atmosphere of delight. There are interconnecting themes which are central to my practice and in this essay, I have given each of them a bit of space, dividing them into chapters. However, these themes converge to an intersection point of craft, joy, somatics and everyday life.

I want to make reference to the influencial book Pleasure Activism by adrienne maree brown. I was first introduced to her work through a somatic workshop by multidisciplinary artist Florence Peake, and immediately afterward ordered my own copy. It has illuminated so much of what I’m interested in, namely: how could it look to focus pleasure and joy in our everyday life through craft and use that focus as a force for being and/or change.
In a particularly inspiring section, brown speaks with Dallas Goldtooth, an organizer at the Indigenous Environmental Network and founder of a political comedy troupe (brown, 2021, p.335). The discussion questions the importance of using comedy, humour and joy as activism.

“You’re using the gift of speech or an action of your body to elicit a sort of response and manipulating emotion. You’re tapping into the core source code of who we are as human beings. I think there are so many people that rarely use the transformative power of humour and light-heartedness of stories’
(brown, 2021, p. 336.)

Although Goldtooth is talking specifically about comedy in this quote, I think that same transformative power of humour and light-heartedness can exist in art, craft and architecture. I believe so much of the reasoning behind the creation of my work lies right here, in this space of using joy and light-heartedness as a means of making, as well as understanding that it is a powerful tool that can be accessed by all human beings. I want this text to support my practice, which is experiential and feeling based, through the interaction of objects I create and their audience.

I end this introduction with a final note on the limitations of this text. Talking about theories such as somatics, public space and accessibility, inevitably means that there are issues running alongside these, creating discrimination and inaccessibility. The body for example is subject to inequality through factors such as gender, class, race, disability. Access to joy or beauty in everyday life is also political, when we look at who has this access. So, I want to acknowledge my own privileges and identify these issues. It is through my creative practice that I attempt to challenge these issues, rather than through this specific text. I do this by keeping them at the foreground of my thinking through making and placing them into these contexts where possible and desired.
Step 1: Finding Joy

I think we have to agree that as a feeling, joy is positive. It could be described as ‘an uncomplicated sense of pleasure’ (Brown, 2021). It takes unique forms for each and every individual, but when we feel joy, it feels good. It’s universal - a feeling which can be accessed by all regardless of age, gender, race or any other defining factor. It’s also one of my main reasons for making - my work exists in the form of objects or installations which inspire moments of joy in everyday life. Craft has the innate ability to bring joy and calm to those both making and experiencing it. Particularly during and post-pandemic, we saw a large number of people leaning into craft, due to this. (Ranamagar and Karki, 2021) There was a surge in the handmade and craft again – home baking, knitting and ceramics to name but a few. (Wood, 2020)

Although it feels like the world has reopened, I think there is a leftover anxiety for many of us that bleeds into our everyday. This is where engaging with craft can help by bringing light-heartedness, be it through physical making but also, as I’ll be suggesting in this essay, through somatic engagement with craft objects.

‘Generating joy is a two-way street: not only does joy uplift and inspire the maker and the creative, it also spreads to those who come into contact with their work… it helps us achieve happiness and meaning, and can also be a powerful force for activism and change’
(Franklin and Till, 2022, p. 8.)

Joy is so incredibly important for all of us to experience, and it can be harnessed, as the quote above says, to bring about change. It is more than just an individual feeling of happiness that I’m talking about. There is potential to harness that universal feeling and use it to bring people together. It’s critical that we understand the power joy and collective happiness holds, and that it can be a powerful force to bring positive change to individuals and communities alike.

I want to refer to Yinka Ilori, a London based designer, and in particular his work ‘Happy Street’ (Ilori, 2019). Ilori transformed the Thessaly Road Railway Bridge from a dilapidated underpass into a colourful space that people commute through on a daily basis, enriching the lives of those who live and work nearby. Ilori’s practice also serves as an example of someone creating work that exists both in galleries and public spaces. Another work I want to reference is his V&A Dundee commission which saw him turn the entrance hall into an interactive playscape featuring pattern, colour and music. Ilori also created a soundscape from this work, recording the sound of joy, laughter and noise as people moved through it. Without doubt, Ilori’s work impacts and changes the lives of the children and adults who engage with it, even just for a small moment in their day. When work like this exists in overlooked spaces or communities, it acts as a
form of resistance and a reminder that everyone deserves to see joy and beauty in their everyday.

‘Perhaps “fun” just by itself, is an aesthetic quality. After all, it is a quality of an activity that involves pleasure’
(Leddy, 2005, p.13)

As philosopher Leddy argues above, if we can equally understand fun as an aesthetic, imagine how much that could open up the world of art and craft in terms of discussion and accessibility, because much like joy, everyone is capable of having fun. A successful example of such a work would perhaps be Carsten Höller’s ‘Test Site’ (Höller, 2006), where he installed functional slides within the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern. Much like Ilori’s ‘Listening to Joy’, I can imagine the sound of entering a museum and hearing laughter and screams of delight, and how the auditory and visual would transform the entire space and my feelings as a viewer.

‘Höller has spoken of delighting in the combination of the visual spectacle of watching others use the slides, and the “inner spectacle” experienced by the sliders—a jolt of fear and pleasure in one rapid descent.’
(Gosling, 2018)

Fun as an aesthetic is also fundamental to my practice, a cousin of joy, and because of this I place an emphasis on bright colours in order to create playful patterns. We know that colour has a huge effect on the mood and emotions of people (Cha, Zhang and Kim, 2020, Kurt and Osueke, 2014) and I use that knowledge of colour when creating my work.

The technique I predominantly use to explore colour is ‘Nerikomi’, a Japanese technique that traditionally combines naturally found, differently coloured clay bodies to form patterned blocks. I approach Nerikomi with contemporary body stains, using these to create my patterned blocks from which I cut slabs. These slabs are then rolled out and formed to create objects, or used as mosaics layered together on the surface of my object. I finish with a transparent glaze over the work, to make it strong and shiny. Often, I add gold lustre as an added layer of adornment.

Traditionally Nerikomi is about creating very specific patterns, but I approach it in a looser and more organic way. I find the rigidity or striving for perfection is antithetical to what I want to achieve in my work, and believe that the technique has so much more potential for fun and playfulness! I rarely plan patterns ahead, I begin to build them depending on how I feel that day, imbedding my own feelings into the objects I’m creating - silliness, fun, excitement and extravagance.

My time at Konstfack has seen a significant change in the texture of my work. After a class visit to Noa Eshkol’s exhibition at Linnköping Konstmuseum we were asked to make a work in response to the exhibition. Although I had previously experimented
with lamination of pattern onto surface, I would only work with one pattern at a time and maintained a flat surface (see image 1). However, Eshkol’s work and approach of combining materials inspired Disco Ball (see image 2), which consists of collaging together different patterns, as well as adding flocking and diamante, onto the surface of the object.

Another development which has resulted in a change of texture, comes from the clean-up stage. When I scrape back the surface of my patterns, I am left with tiny scraps of coloured clay. Previously I binned these, but this is against policy at Konstfack. Instead, I now reuse these and layer them back onto the surface of the work. This has added texture and tactility to my work, which wasn’t present before. It also means there is now no waste being produced when I create my work – all previously excess material is reused.
Image 1: Neufeldt (2019) *My Big Checkered Boy*

Image 2: Neufeldt (2022) *Disco Ball*
An important thing to address, particularly in ceramics where it can often be seen as 'faulty', is that my work tends to have surface cracking. However, this cracking is something I have come to accept and understand as being essentially unavoidable, due to the processes involved. So, I acknowledge its part in my process and rather than ignore it, I use another Japanese technique called Kintsugi, to highlight the cracks, their beauty, inevitability and the metaphor they represent. This is a method of applying resin and gold or silver powder, to "repair" cracking or breakage. Importantly, Kintsugi celebrates the uniqueness of an object. As a process it highlights the journey an object has been on, and although breaks or cracks might happen rather than throw it away, we can be more sustainable by sitting with them, taking time to repair them and understand that they become more meaningful as a result of it. It brings joy to me to make use of these materials and objects which could otherwise be considered waste, to slow down and appreciate the history of an object. Also, let's be honest, I love the extravagance of adding more gold to my work, what better way to celebrate and bring joy than to add some bling!

To summarise this chapter, it's this idea of finding joy and fun through the objects that I create which is important to me. For me this joy exists in the colours, textures and gold within my work. I'm now exploring how to use my objects to spread this joy to the public and bring positivity to the everyday.

This was the catalyst for 'Merry-Go-Round', an installation I created on the front revolving doors of Konstfack. I wanted to bring a moment of surprise and delight to anyone entering or exiting the school, through the unconscious touch of the panels on the door. Using these new processes I collaged together ceramic tiles, tufting (a very kind present from Karina Presttun!) and of course a couple of rhinestones, onto the door panels. This was my first-time working site-specifically, bringing a selection of tiles and arranging them directly and intuitively onto the door. For me this work was a success, firstly as a method to teach me a different way of working within a space, installing site-specifically as people were in the process of using the door. But more importantly, I felt so happy getting positive feedback from a lot of people, specifically mentioning the joy they had felt on entering the building. It was a small proof to me that I can achieve what I'm setting out to do in my work.
Images 3 & 4: Neufeldt (2022) *Merry-Go-Round* [2 of 8 panels]

Image 5: Neufeldt (2022) *Merry-Go-Round* [still of video documentation]

Available at: [https://vimeo.com/786399347](https://vimeo.com/786399347)
Step 2: Somatic Awareness and the Everyday

Let’s imagine we’ve been taught to learn through our body, and that the way we experience our everyday is incredibly valuable. The smell of my fresh coffee in the morning, choosing a mug from my collection and feeling its weight in my hands, the feeling when I first put my face into the hot water in the shower, the feeling of commuting to school - the subway gently pulling me backwards and forwards with each stop. All these micro-moments that the majority of us over-look, when in fact they make up the emotional foundations of our life – and that’s why I place such an importance on these daily rituals.

Sarah Pink writes in her book *Situating Everyday Life* that ‘we are both in the flow of everyday life, of being and doing, and we are in and part of the very environments of everyday life.’ (Pink, 2012, p.34) I see this as a way of understanding that we are in our bodies, but we are also organisms’ part of a wider world, and that everything we come into contact with (be it a cold wind turning our nose red or a scratchy handknitted jumper) has the ability to shape us and our life, albeit in a very small way. This is why what we encounter and surround ourselves with on a daily basis is vital, because our body is constantly engaging, experiencing and understanding through these very things.

Richard Schusterman coined the term ‘somaesthetics’ (Schusterman, 2012) to summarise the concept that our bodily understanding of our aesthetics is as powerful as our cognitive. A good example is that of having a favourite coffee mug (if I’m allowed to be biased as a ceramicist!) as I find it is a simple way to explain this theory. Essentially, that we have embodied feelings or emotions towards the favourite cup, as opposed to a cognitive reasoning. The same could be said for any sentimental object in our life and it shows that our empirical understanding is just as powerful and capable as our rational reasoning. Somatics asks us to become aware of our body and feeling, and use that as a tool when experiencing our surroundings.

So many activities that we do can be understood through the body. I could give examples such as dancing or skydiving - a moment which is understood through the body and through the bodies’ movement. Or perhaps another example can be music. When I listen to instrumental music – there are no lyrics, no literal cognitive understanding, yet it is incredibly powerful to experience the music and notes, the swells of sound and to notice its effect on how I feel.

Image 7: Neufeldt (2020) *The Mondrian Collection*
We are also capable of holding a huge amount of information in our bodies. Our body holds pain, trauma and excitement. And biologically, our body has its own reactions entirely, that are out-with our control. It can sweat if we’re excited or it can get goosebumps when we’re fearful – our body has its own way of perceiving and reacting to the world and we’re simply inhabiting this organism. Although the mind is thinking, the body is feeling.

I think the body is still widely over-looked as an entity with which we can understand our surroundings, in the sense that somatics is often discussed in relation to choreography and movement or within alternative medicine. However, there is a huge link between somatics and craft, which is more rarely written and spoken about. We are schooled in a very specific way when looking at art and asked to question – what does this mean? Whereas, a focus in my practice is to question, how does this make me feel? How can we begin, at a cultural and institutional level, to understand that art, craft and architecture is equally felt experientially and through the body. I believe that by shifting some of the importance from the cognitive to the emotional, we open up an entirely new way of engaging with and perceiving art, in a way that I believe is more inclusive and accessible.

In relation to my practice, somatics becomes part of a theoretical framework that allows me to create through feeling, for feeling. We all have bodies and we all have the ability to feel emotions. Therefore, in terms of accessibility, I like the idea of making work that brings joy to the body, as that can be accessed by all.

’Everything we build is an extension of ourselves and our nervous systems.’
(Weig, 2022)

This idea of somatics is also inevitably built into the objects I create, as the quote from a podasted conversation between Weig and architect Juhani Pallasmaa above suggests. Everything I create with my body, becomes an extension of it. In my opinion there is no separating craft from the maker. I was lucky enough to attend a somatics and movement-based ceramic workshop over several weeks in September 2022, run by the aforementioned artist Florence Peake. We worked through several sessions of the Skinner Releasing Technique, a technique imagined as a way of reacting entirely through the body to various stimuli, without explicit instruction. Following this, we began incorporating movement with clay and finally began creating ‘encasements’, whereby the entire person is covered in clay. The final week saw us work with fired ceramic objects from the previous weeks, using these to create a performance or movement work in relation to the object, which I will discuss further in the next chapter.
This workshop was pivotal to my practice, as it changed how I understood and related to clay as a material. Consequently, as a reaction to the workshop, I began to feel the urge to work larger scale. The feeling of working and building with your entire body is incredible and for me, has become somewhat addictive. Moving a material like clay, in large heavy amounts and feeling how the clay moves me back, how it affects my muscles, that inevitably it contains my skin, my sweat, is grounding for me. I feel almost maternal when I build and push, understanding that the object has the ability to stand its own ground and force my body to move in a specific way to accommodate its own needs. My practice when building becomes a constant connectivity and relationship between material, object, space and body.

This theory and understanding of somatics is central in my practice, both as a means of creation and understanding. Similar to when I make patterns, these objects become embodied with my own feelings, which I would suggest is the case for most crafted objects. By placing importance on the tactile understanding we can have with these objects, we open ourselves up to connecting with them through feeling. Cultivating bodily practices heightens our sensations and perceptions of the world around us. And this is where for me, somaesthetics connects us to the aesthetics of everyday life. It becomes the base of how we are understanding and perceiving how the world around us and our daily lives look.

Here I want to make a reference to Juhani Pallasmaa, an architect known for his theory that we should think of architecture as a verb not a noun. This is due to the fact that when we enter a space or built environment, we are experiencing it through the entirety of our body and perception. (Weig, 2019) However, I want to quote from an interview with Michael J. Crosbie and Pallasmaa. (Crosbie, 2022) This expands upon my discussion surrounding mental wellbeing and joy in the first chapter, and how that connects to somatics. I believe it is crucial that we become more somatically aware in all aspects of our life, in order to feel more at peace.

**MJC:**

_Here is an arresting, beautiful line: “The task of architecture is to maintain and defend silence.” How do you describe that task, and why is it critical?_

**JP:**

_Our lives are becoming increasingly rushed and noisy. But our sensory and neural systems need slowness and silence to perform well. With the outer noise, I believe we’ve lost our inner silence. It’s similar to the way we need shadow and darkness instead of constant bright light. We need silence—not necessarily acoustical silence, but existential silence and peacefulness mediated by humane spaces and imagery._

(Crosbie, 2022)
For me, slowing down in my everyday is linked to my physical practice, for example through hand-building and Kintsugi. However, I am also interested in creating the humane space Pallasmaa speaks of and exploring what these might resemble. Through the installation of my work, I am hoping to make a space for and highlight the importance of slowing down in our everyday life.

I want to draw focus to the fact that mental wellbeing can be directly linked to our simple everyday interactions and with this understanding, comes the potential to evoke change in our everyday lives, albeit in small ways. And then, with increased somatic awareness, we can begin to relate to our world differently and I believe, we can begin to understand ourself and our own needs better.

Pallasma can also be quoted as saying ‘as we enter a space, the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject’ (Pallasma, 2014, p.232) So when I’m speaking of our daily environments, I do believe craft, art and architecture are a key aspect of this. We are incredibly influenced by our surroundings, that everything around us can be understood and perceived through feeling and the body. With this in mind, I began to work with objects that can exist in our daily environments, whose functions are understandable and therefore encourage this tactile interaction. The focus of my Spring Exhibition is the creation of street furniture and it began as a reaction to these ideas of the importance of wellbeing, joy and somatics. While ‘Merry-Go-Round’ will focus on a small moment of surprise, the street furniture will exist as expected objects in their environment, thereby allowing for longer interactions and engagement. One can simply use them as part of their everyday life, perhaps on a sunny day it’s a place to people-watch or to eat lunch. Or to simple sit and exist and take a moment to bask in the sun, appreciating slowness.
Image 8: Neufeldt (2022) Self-portrait with ‘Please Throw Away Your Rubbish’ as a work in progress.
Step 3: Publicly Available Craft

When I speak about the importance of joy and somatics, I hope this is now clear to you how this directly relates to everyday life for me. The everyday is a source of inspiration for my practice and also a place in which to situate and exhibit my work.

As part of the previously mentioned workshop with Florence (Peake, 2022) we were asked to perform or create an interaction with the objects we had made during the previous workshops. This accumulated into a video performance of ´Coffee Mittens´ (see image 9) in which I created a self-imposed rule not to remove my ceramic mittens once I had gone outside, thereby wearing them to complete tasks such as buying a coffee and checking my phone. This performance was so different from my usual work - it was absurd, awkward and funny. Whereby I usually create objects with an intentional function, these objects instead were made from a place of pure feeling and bodily engagement, from and through movement, with a function attached by me later on. This was another crucial learning point from the workshop. It made me question how I understand the function of the ceramics I create, within the context of everyday life. It also becomes another method and process to explore joy, by creating without set intention.

Another excerpt from adrienne maree brown’s ´Pleasure Activism´ where she talks of this need to be surrounded with and engaging in pleasure activities which exist in daily life, begins to tie together all of the themes I have been discussing.

´Pleasure activism asserts that we all need and deserve pleasure and that our social structures must reflect this. In this moment, we must prioritize the pleasure of those most impacted by oppression. Pleasure activists seek to understand and learn from the politics and power dynamics inside of everything that makes us feel good. This includes sex and the erotic, drugs, fashion, humor, passion work, connection, reading, cooking and/or eating, music and other arts, and so much more.´

(brown, 2021, p.13)

Many of these activities could easily be overlooked as mundane aspects of everyday life. However, I find this quote so interesting because all of these very much ordinary actions are an amassing of the ways in which the body somatically experiences joy and pleasure. It also asserts what I spoke about in the first chapter – the power of joy as a tool of change and activism, to bring an understanding that pleasure is something we can all access. The more we realise how and where our body can be comprehending and engaging with pleasure, the more we can then begin to observe and recognise it in our everyday.
Image 9: Neufeldt (2022) *Coffee Mittens*

Image 10: Neufeldt (2022) *Coffee Mittens* [still from video performance]

Available at: https://vimeo.com/788080388 & https://vimeo.com/788079556
'Utopia calls forth a process of becoming utopian: of breaking with official normativity, seeing the world with new eyes, and contributing politically and artistically, day by day, year by year, to recasting that world in the name of all life and not a privileged few.'

(Waterman, 2022)

By considering the everyday, we can begin to question activism, sustainability and as the above quote from Waterman suggests – how to contribute to recasting the world with more accessibility for all. What does it look like to live an everyday life that holds, sustains and encourages joy? Of course, as a craftsperson, I look to the objects within the given environment and I propose that these objects can be the cause, particularly when they are understood through the experience of their use. Importantly, if I'm creating work intended to inspire joy, then of course the intention is for that work to be for everyone. Unfortunately (but realistically) I don't expect my work to recast our entire world. But I do believe that it has the power to brighten up a moment in someone’s day and bring joy through an interaction, which in itself is powerful.

As I spoke about in the introduction, my question is still that of – how can I begin to translate that joy and fun into my work in order to impact others? This is where interaction and functionality feature in my practice. Interaction in everyday spaces is the hidden nook where I think joy can reside. I want people to interact in an organic way, to notice the work but also to use it as intended and for the work to exist naturally as a part of the everyday. The purpose of publicly accessible craft is the possibility of active engagement, with an understanding of the physical difference that can be made to everyday life, through tactile and visual interaction.

Martin Creed’s work is an example of blending joy, playfulness, engagement and the everyday. He uses pattern, colour and sequence to attempt to organise the chaos within his everyday life.

‘Creed makes no separation between his work and everyday life, between art galleries and the outside world.’ (Hauser and Wirth, 2020)

Although he’s not a craftsperson, it’s his methodology and approach that I relate to, his way of engaging and commenting on his everyday experiences, making them fun and interactive. A personal favourite of mine is ‘Work No. 592’ (Creed, 2006) which consists of a sound piece within a lift, so that as you move up and down through the building a choir is singing. Another favourite is ‘Work No. 2708’ where he uses the shopping bags that he collected for years to create a work.

‘Often disarmingly simple, they help us see the everyday through a new lens’ (Bloomberg Quicktake: Originals Youtube, 2016)
I love Creed’s way of perceiving his everyday and changing small aspects in a very humorous way, in particular because my work is also undoubtedly playful and silly. If objects become too sculptural, they might alienate the exact viewer who I’m trying to reach. By playing with the objects and environments we encounter on a daily basis instead, we can create more accessible experiences.

Creed’s work is varied and not based in a specific material or craft, however I argue that craft and craft objects are particularly special in the everyday, because of their ability for functionality and tactile interaction, both domestically and publicly.

We see the impact placing value on beauty and objects can have, in social projects such as those by the artist collective Assemble. Based in Liverpool, their projects include working in areas to restore houses, collaborating with local craftspeople. These houses are then are used as community spaces and offer artist residences, bringing life, safe space and creativity back into these overlooked areas. (Assemble, 2019) This is just one examples of using craft within the domestic sphere to create experiences of pleasure and collective joy.

I want to address the domestic, as previously the focus of my practice was on homeware, due to its ability to be carried into a space of close personal interaction. For this reason, I will always place value upon and continue to joyfully make homeware, alongside my practice. However, more recently due to the considerations above, I have been exploring the everyday outside of the home too, with the creation of street furniture and working in public space.

Street furniture is a way of further exploring some of these questions in my final project. Objects such as benches and bins, signify much of what I place importance on. They exist in the everyday and have a clear, accessible function. They are large-scale and functional, but they’re also often a bit boring – which is why I want to change that and make some fun and colourful versions. (Herring, 2016) I wish to create interactive objects that are visually striking, which would allow for an intervention into daily life.

Looking to our everyday landscape, and reminding you of Ilori’s ‘Happy Street’ (2021) the subway system here in Stockholm is another good example of craft, art and the everyday casually intersecting. Unlike Ilori’s work, which exists as one underpass, each of Stockholm’s subway stations has uniquely commissioned work by artists, with many stations focusing on decorative tiles and ceramics.
Image 11: Neufeldt (2023) *Please Throw Away Your Rubbish*
Image 12: Neufeldt (2023) Please Take A Seat
"Why not make underground travel an experience instead of just a means of transport?" (Stockholm Transport, 2008)

This quote summarises a lot of my own questions and feelings about where I imagine situating my work. Stockholm is doing an impressive job of showing how art and craft can be introduced into everyday spaces, thereby enhancing the experience of the public, bringing about more mindfulness, happiness and humour. I believe that when we place art in a more casual setting, it allows for more people to engage with it.

Much like Creed, I also have an interest in the mundane and silly within the everyday. This means I have a number of smaller side projects which I think are funny, that invite interaction with materiality in unusual places. ‘Chewed up and spat out, imprints of my mouth’ came from interest in the simple idea of chewing gum – how it takes a unique form once it has been chewed in our mouths, the way it contains our salvia. This intimacy crossed with the mundanity of how it’s simply spat out and exists on the pavements, squashed in, interests me. I chewed my own gum and used this to create simple plaster moulds, from which I created ceramic versions. I would like to cast gum from friends and family too as the next step, perhaps making a ‘Gumball Machine’, to endlessly distribute these intricate, everyday landscapes.

‘Stop The Bus’ is another small on-going project, whereby I create and stick ceramic tiles to the stop buttons on buses, as a simple way of interrupting someone’s day with craft, through subconscious tactile engagement. Much like Creed, these smaller projects are simply part of a larger practice and interest in the everyday and where we can find joy and amusement.

In the future, the dream for my practice would be a continuation of building furniture and would even allow for a further expansion in scale, to tile a swimming pool or to create a bus shelter. Large scale installations that can become activated through use and experienced by the entirety of the body are what I am drawn to. It comes down to creating something that can be experienced by everyone. Using craft to make sure that all people know they are welcome and wanted. If possible, it would be incredible to also involve local communities and workshops in my practice, collaborating to bring joy to their areas.
Image 13: Neufeldt (2022) *Chewed up and spat out, imprints of my mouth*

Image 14: Neufeldt (2023) *Stop the Bus*
Conclusion: Now You Will Find Moments of Joy

I hope this essay has given some insight into the reasons behind and ideas within my practice that support the processes of my making.

It is clear from this essay and when I am writing, that these topics – of joy, somatics, the everyday all intertwine and overlap within my practice and the physical work that I make. There is not just one single, clear meaning – rather my practice is a realisation and accumulation of my daily life, my body and my experiences, with the hope of using my craft to create an intervention into the daily life of others.

I want to include a memory of my undergraduate degree show in 2018, ‘Time for a cuppa?’ - in which I created an installation comprising of an electric wheel, where I ran public workshops teaching people how to throw their own pot. I also built a table, which was set up with mugs, teapots and plates I had made – where people were invited to join me for a chat and tea, coffee, biscuits – fika as you’d say in Sweden! I had so much wonderful feedback of happiness, with people joining in to throw a pot, have a cup of tea and biscuit and to simply exist in the space I had created.

A lot has progressed in my work since then, particularly the understanding I have for my practice and my reasons for making. But when I pulled at these threads in my writing - of joy, of accessibility, of somatics – it becomes clear that they have been there all along. It’s important that we understand and place value on our everyday experiences where possible, in order to find joy in the small things.

As much as I am able to write and underpin my practice in essays such as this one and in artists talks, I also believe that the work I create should speak for itself, because of the importance of accessibility and the relatability of joy. One should not need to know about somatics or everyday aesthetics in order to understand – they can simply sit on a ceramic bench I made or be surprised by an installation on a revolving door - and that itself is enough. It’s the experience of what I create that is important, rather than the conceptual theories behind it. It is about placing objects casually within everyday life, rather than creating a distinction between life and art.

I feel a confidence and validity in my work now, that I previously lacked. The notion of creating work that inspired joy, through aesthetic appreciation or simple everyday interactions, felt invalid somehow. But I have realised that the notion of creating joy through my craft is the key component, because ultimately anyone and everyone can engage with that. I want to make my work and put it out into the world for a reason of course, but I have also found a simple comfort in knowing that if it makes me happy to create my work, maybe it could make someone else happy to experience it – that is validation and success for me.
Bibliography

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Magazines


Articles


Catalogues


Workshops


Architecture


Exhibitions


Websites


Videos


Podcasts

Image References


Appendix

In terms of the examination, I feel that overall and maybe simply put, it was good – certainly not a catastrophe and certainly not incredible.

I felt that the conversation was very processed based, which perhaps I wasn’t as prepared for, in the sense that much of my processes and making come from a place of feeling. For example, if you ask me why I chose a certain pattern or colour or repetition, I don’t necessarily have a definitive answer. I would truthfully say that I just felt like it. And for me, that feels like an adequate response, because as this entire essay argues, I believe that we should be allowed to make and view and discuss work based on our feelings for it, rather than having specific, and perhaps more cognitive reasons, for choosing what we make and why.

It’s not that I think my opponent disagreed with these intentions, rather, I felt there was small disconnect between me and him in our interests. I would much rather talk about craft and joy and feeling and all that it could do, rather than, for example, discussing why I decided to make a specific pattern on a specific object.

The exam was very helpful in getting an unbiased view onto my work and it left me with ideas of ‘containing chaos’, that the works which my opponent found more visually successful seemed to be the ones that have a sense of certainty and simplicity in their design, combined with the elaborate nature of Nerikomi. So, for example, the bench and the tiles, which have a simple shape rather than the bin which is irregular or, as he questioned, the push panels during the exam. It was actually for this reason I re-visited the push door panels in ‘Merry-Go-Round’ to create ones which matched those on the revolving door. I think this worked much better and gave the work a more cohesive feel. So, although we maybe didn’t have the same interest in process, I personally found the feedback that came from the examination was very insightful and helpful.

Going forward, this is perhaps what I’m keen to explore; to find a balance between form and aesthetic. However, I still want there to be flourish, extravagance and trashiness. I don’t want to reduce my objects to a flat surface, like I previously used to, purely to make them more palatable and functional. It’s important for me to keep making work that excites me and that brings me joy when making.

The show was a whirlwind of people and energy. It was really lovely to see how effortlessly and casually people used the work. Not just during the show, but later in the week too, when I spotted students and local builders sitting on it to eat their lunch, which of course made me so happy knowing that it was being used how I’d hoped. Rubbish and wrappers were thrown away in the bin and cigarettes were left in the
ashtray. It felt like the furniture was absorbed into the environment. And the ashtray on the bin brought a lot of humour which was fun to see.

I also left the chalk out this time because I wanted to bring more life to the space and installation. I loved coming back each day to see more drawings on the ground and more rubbish in the bin. The installation had a life of its own, happening in secret. I wasn’t sure people would engage with the chalk so it was great that they did, and brought their own ideas and drawings to the space.

Also, I think it’s been an interesting experience of my own connection to the work throughout the exam and show. When I first made the works I had a certain level of attachment to them, something I think a lot of makers could relate to. But, in order for me to place them outside (with the knowledge of bad weather or perhaps people being rude to them) I had to release my own attachment to the objects and let them be. And I was very much aware that I would need to do this and would talk about it prior – but! the actual physical experience of doing it was something different again.

That first night I had left them outside before my exam, I was so worried and rushed to school the next day to see if they had survived! And then, after those first couple of days before the exam, I was able to fully relax and release. To see that they were happy and in use, and they maybe got a small bump here or a chip there, but that it didn’t upset me. I feel like my process began in the making of work but also showed me an insight into how I can overcome my own attachments to my work, in order to let them be used publicly and thereby bring joy to many.

It really feels like the installation came to life throughout the week and through its use. The work wasn’t just about the objects themselves, but the use of them and the surrounding area. The joy spreading and creating change in the environment it was placed.

Finding a home for the work is the final step. Ideally, I want them to be situated in a place of use, near a community centre. But I only have a few days left to find them a home – so let’s see!