

SECOND HAND STORIES

- reflections on the project

Caroline Slotte

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If I believed it were possible, if I thought I could explain.

Then I would write about how the objects we live among and the rooms we reside in establish themselves in our minds, inhabit our memories and become part of us. I would write about how they stay with us, as images, as tableaux. How they can come to assume meanings, be associated with a sentiment, a mood, an important or unimportant event. Or simply exist there without distinct meanings.

I would write about how our life journey, our movements in time and space, with others or alone, lingers within us as faintly resounding echoes. How the objects and places, as people, grow familiar and dear to us. And I would write about how the places we once knew but never returned to leave the most distinct images. How the memories that are left in peace lose touch with reality over time, becoming symbols, signs. Thus, we all bear within us a collection of dimly-lit tableaux. And without these, existence would be unbearable – but neither do we know exactly of what use they are to us.

So, if I believed it were possible to describe, that I could explain, I would write about all these images within me – I would say that they are who I am. And hence, that I constantly carry with me a low varnished beech-wood coffee table, a far too pink wallpaper, a gravel walk with sharp pebbles, a Volkswagen that smells of petrol, a brass fish-shaped corkscrew, a pale yellow Finnish post-war prefab with a roughcast facade, a lump of butterscotch in a small box, a blue terrycloth gymnastics outfit, a potato cellar with a cold earthen floor, a staircase with a prickly light-brown carpet, a beach with heavy, warm sand, an asphalt road, a living room suite in brown corduroy, a rusty bus wreck, a dark-blue velvet waistcoat, a playground surrounded by modern terrace houses, a plate with a grey landscape scene, a ditch full of nettles, a backyard with a tall white fence.

This is what I would write about if I believed it were possible, if I thought someone could understand.



INTRODUCTION

Research is pioneer work, the task being to create
some kind of clarity out of chaos.

ASLAUG NYRNES

This is a companion text. It was written as part of the research fellowship project *Second Hand Stories* at Bergen National Academy of the Arts in 2007-2011.¹

Artistic research is the core around which the entire project has circled. For the past ten years, I have specialised in an artistic practice: direct processing of ceramic second-hand material. Although this method is not entirely unique, it is hitherto undocumented to the extent that it prompted me to a more thorough exploration. However, I am not primarily concerned with the purely technical aspects of the work; instead, I have expressly focused on a qualitative study of the artistic potential of the ceramic second-hand material.

This text was written towards the end of the research fellowship and can be seen as a form of travelogue. Its purpose is to visualise, discuss and give a background to my artistic research. The text should accompany us – you, me – through the most crucial stages and themes of the work, thereby enabling us to relate to, talk about and evaluate the development of the project and the end result.

I am now at a different point than I was at the beginning of my journey – that much is clear. But how did I get here, who did I encounter on the way, and why did I even set out on this journey? Often, when writing, the road miraculously becomes clearer as you walk – the ground becomes visible with every footstep. It is with hopes of that kind that I also devote myself to this text.

A few words on the contents

I have tried to make meaningful objects, after which I have tried to say something true about why I made them.

This is basically what my project has been about. However banal, or simplistic, it may appear, this statement is not devoid of aspirations. On the contrary, my attempt entailed committing myself to an earnest striving. I have endeavoured constantly to observe my artistic processing of the ceramic objects with a perception of meaningfulness. And I have set a goal of not using language for any purpose other than as a means of seeking to understand.

1 Translation into English by Gabriella Berggren, Nordén & Berggren HB.

The project's development of knowledge is to be found primarily within, or in direct proximity with, the actual artistic work. This is something I aim to make visible through a close scrutiny of my own work process. I see great potential in this form of "close" writing. On the strength of the artist's position, he or she opens up an entirely new source of knowledge. He or she provides a voice from within – a peephole into the creative process.

In the written part of the development work, the exploration of a subjective narrative voice has preoccupied me. I have sought a language that brings us up close to the intuitive processes and deeper motives that are often embedded in creativity. My intention has been to approach the writing as a learning process and, by verbalising, to make visible the tacit knowledge that guides the artistic work. I have interested myself in how the contents of a text is influenced by the style, genre or tone in which it is written. The choice to give room for a voice as subjective as this is controversial, and thus something I wish to explore and discuss in the chapter PROGRESSIVE WRITING. The bulk of this subjective textual exploration is found in the exhibition publication *Closer/Närmare*. I have included a few examples in the form of the solitary passages in italics separating the first four chapters, but primarily, I will *discuss* subjective writing rather than *demonstrate* it in this paper.

In the chapter on MEMORY OBJECTS AND MEMORIES OF OBJECTS I discuss the theme of my project: the link between memories and objects in human experience. I am fascinated by how we tend to grow attached to objects in our surroundings, and how these objects take on a significance as tangible reminders of our history. Our personal memories are often strongly connected to the material environment that surrounds them. In this way, we all bear a mental baggage of inner images. In our thoughts, we can return in time and "see" these images in our mind and "dwell" in the past. Since I utilise second-hand objects in my art, the link between memories and objects is an issue that has long been begging for my attention. The meaning of objects to the creation of continuity and context for the individual is the theme I have chosen to study more closely as part of my research fellowship project.

The actual work in the studio has formed the core of my project. In my daily, explorative practice, countless decisions are made. Some questions have been especially significant to the artistic development of the project. I discuss these in the chapter titled IN THE STUDIO. These questions can concern the balance between the familiar and the enigmatic in the manipulated objects, the impact of contradiction in generating tension and intensity, the importance of curiosity, and the production of serialised works. The questions are based firmly in the visual practice. They reveal the practical process behind the art, the experimentation, the testing, adjusting, balancing, rejecting and accepting – all the major and minor decisions that lead up to the end result.

The final artistic result of the project comprised two series of works, *Unidentified View* and *Going Blank Again*, featured in the exhibition *Going Blank Again* at Gallery s.e in Bergen (16 October-21 November, 2010), and a publication, *Closer/Närmare*. I have described the book *Closer/Närmare* as an expanded exhibition catalogue, aimed at presenting the work process and theme of my research fellowship project to a wider public. In addition to the visual documentation, *Closer/Närmare* includes a large portion of the textual material I wrote in the course of the project.

In the chapter titled BEYOND THE STUDIO I address issues concerning the presentation of the completed works, describing the intentions behind the final exhibition, the selection of works and choice of presentation format, and the idea behind the publication. However, the presentation aspect is present throughout the artistic process, and was not, therefore, merely activated by the final exhibition itself. The ideas I discuss in this chapter should thus be regarded as the fruit of repeated considerations made over a three-year period, not as conclusions stemming directly from the final exhibition. One issue of particular weight in this context was how to create focus in the presentation of my works.

In my day-to-day artistic work, I make decisions based on focused attention, visual testing and careful observation of these tests. I consider the visual, tactile qualities of the material, along with its conceptual, ideational impact. A combination of these two aspects – the sensual, perceptive on the one hand, and the conceptual, associative on the other – also forms the basis for my choice of references and my fascination for the field in contemporary visual culture that I have chosen to call material-based art.

The chapter on MATERIAL-BASED CONTEMPORARY ART includes a description of this field. I use the term ‘material-based contemporary art’ to denote an activity in which materials play a key role, both physically and conceptually, and which can thus be regarded as being concerned with both materials and concepts. In this chapter, I also describe three of my favourite artists: Ane Mette Hol, Susan Collis and Kjell Rylander. My intention in discussing a few of their works is to put my own practice in perspective. Thus, this should be regarded as a rough outline of my personal field of interest, rather than as a comprehensive or objective analysis of a contemporary genre. These artists were chosen primarily because they inspire me. In that way, the references I discuss here reveal something about my aims – as well as about my present position.

The text ends with a retrospective view. In the chapter titled LOOKING BACK, I reflect on the *Second Hand Stories* project as a whole, from start to finish. I discuss the progress of the project, from the perspective of my own personal aspirations and my ambitions on behalf of the field of contemporary ceramics itself. To what extent did my plans bear fruit, and why were not all my expectations fulfilled? What have I learned from my period as a research fellow that I did not know before, and how will this influence my future work as an artist?

I am standing in a doorway. It's dark in front of me. I can't make out how large the room is. A dim light is visible in there. The light falls upon various kinds of objects, but everything is vague, unclear. I am drawn to the light, drawn into the room.

I approach the point of light, and put my face close to it. Something happens as I view the objects – the haze disappears, colours brighten. Eventually, one of the objects becomes so clear that I can grasp it. I lift it up, feel its weight in my hand, its surface under my fingertips. As I do this, more of the room emerges. A light that was not there previously is switched on, and new objects become visible. The contours of the room become more defined.

But I am the only one here. Those standing outside cannot see what I see, they can't get close enough. So I start to speak. I describe what I see as precisely as I can: the details of every object, the room in its entirety, and the relative position of everything in it. The more I speak, the more enthusiastic I become, for it is as though the connections between the objects become increasingly distinct as I speak – as though everything in here is linked, and all I need to do is to look around carefully.

While I have been speaking, the room has grown brighter. I can move around freely. Some shaded areas remain, as always in a room, but the open surfaces are now clear of anything to stumble on. I can either stay here or move on. The room now belongs to me.



Furthermore, verbal language may be a help or a hindrance; it may strengthen, clarify, diminish or even prevent the artistic project from unfolding. The researcher has to be wary to ensure that the verbal language does not govern the situation.

ASLAUG NYRNES

When writing about my own art, I often get the sense that words and work don't quite match. Like equal magnet poles, they repel one another; as if moved by an invisible force they slide apart. Only by the utmost coercion, and only for short moments at a time, do I ever manage to bring text and work together, surface to surface.

And yet, it is right here, in the quest for satisfactory verbal counterparts to the artistic process, that I want to linger. I have sought a voice that truly says what I mean, a voice whose inner timbre I can recognise, the voice of my unarticulated ideas. This has captivated me to the degree that it became one of my central areas of exploration during my time as a research fellow.

In an international perspective, the Norwegian research fellowship programme puts particular emphasis on the artistic element of the projects. Developing artistic skills at a high level is an explicit goal. This is a programme under development, and there is still a high degree of open-mindedness regarding both the form and content of the written result, "the critical reflection". For the individual research fellow, this open-mindedness presents an opportunity – yes, it could even be interpreted as a challenge, to experiment with text, to explore different kinds of textuality. What kind of text is meaningful in relation to my project? How can I, as a practitioner, contribute specifically by writing? In what way, in what voices, or in what genres, is this best achieved?

In this chapter, I will deal with the textual study that has evolved into a vital part of my fellowship project. My contribution here, however, is a discussion, rather than a demonstration, of free, experimental writing. In this paper, I have intentionally chosen a more communicative, argumentative and explanatory voice, while the subjective prose I refer to is found mainly in the exhibition publication *Closer/Närmare*.

And yet, going by the way in which the criteria for the "critical reflection" are formulated, an intimate, literary or poetic tone would not be acceptable in the final written documentation required by the Research Fellowship Programme. In the concluding reflecting documentation, the research fellow is expected to account for his or her "perspective/work in relation to chosen subject area nationally or internationally", and for "how the project contributes to professional development of the subject area", and

to demonstrate “critical reflection on process [... and] results”.² Indirectly, all these stipulations require the writer to maintain a distance to the project. They demand a degree of detachment in the verbal format and postulate the use of external references. The choice of medium and form may be free, but in reality the text genre is controlled quite rigidly by these specifications.

The voice from within

As a writing artist, my approach is that I both can and should say something about my work that could not have been said by anyone else. A text is always influenced by the author’s point of departure. Thus, in situations where the artist is expected to say something about the project in progress (as is often the case also in non-institutional contexts), it cannot be ignored that we are in the middle of what we are writing about. It would be strange if this were not to influence our writing. Isn’t that the point, that the artist, thanks to this inside perspective, has access to information that would be out of reach to a more detached eye?

To me, the potential of text to reduce the distance between beholder and work of art has been my guiding idea. The role of writing in my research fellowship project has explicitly been to facilitate understanding, to bring the visual, concrete result closer to the beholder and, consequently, closer to myself.

My aim has been to write about a field – to lay bare and shed light on a thematic area I was working in already at the start of the project, but which nevertheless appeared obscure to me. “Closeness” has been a key word and the written part has served as a form of close reading of my creative process. I have striven to retell events that would normally lie beyond the sphere of language, processes that take place tacitly. By writing very close to the creative process I am offering information that no one else could have offered. This is crucial. If anyone else could have performed the same study, possibly with greater success – then I can see no reason why it should be done by me.

I have striven for a deeper understanding of what I do in my practice, and why I do it. If this now sounds as if I did not know what I was doing before, there may be some truth in it. Art production consists of many small and large considerations, with regard to both practical challenges and conceptual, thematic issues. At times, these decisions appear to come easily and spontaneously, but just as often, decisions are made after careful deliberation. In both cases, this process usually takes place tacitly, decisions are made in a silent inner dialogue. To put words to these processes is an effective way of raising them to a conscious level, making them visible. In that way, I regard the writing element in my project to have largely concerned making already existing, hitherto unarticulated knowledge accessible.

² See the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme regulations, paragraph 5, part 2: <http://www.kunststipendiat.no/index.php/en/regulations>

Showing, not telling

In my textually based work, my approach has been one of attentive listening, curiosity and acceptance. I have searched for common territory in the things I attempt to describe: the art works and the process by which they are made, and my way of doing it: the language, the voice in which I speak. I have submerged myself in my theme, and trusted that my intuition would move the exploration forward. In consequence, parts of the text I produced emanated from the same source as the art, that is, they have been virtually fictional. Thus, language becomes something that does not behold the art phenomenon at a distance – but something that shares the same origin.

Since the project theme relates to memories and remembered objects, it lay close at hand to start by recording images from my own memories. In this way, we can see that the theme at hand has influenced the written development towards subjectivity. In these texts, I have striven to describe a personally experienced situation, mood or feeling as precisely as possible, based on the places, rooms and objects I remember. These are my own object memories. The intention of this has been to gain a deeper understanding of how a thematic starting point of this kind influences my artistic work – while also trying to get to the bottom of why this subject preoccupies me as it does.

These written images from memory gradually proved to be exceedingly informative; instead of explaining, they demonstrate what I mean. These free, subjective texts visualise my fascination for the subject, they reveal the urges and pleasures behind my work. They form a language that opens up, presents, gives us a background – a language that narrates rather than analyses. The words and images, texts and objects, are all on the same intuitive, pre-analytical level here. A text evolves that does not claim to know. But which nevertheless, in being faithful to intuition, reveals something, presents knowledge that would have been hard to get at in any other way. Enabling us to see something we could not see before.

Once I had found a narrative voice that worked, I could take it with me into other writing too. So, although my memory theme influenced the written part of the project directly, I believe that subjective writing is nevertheless more widely applicable. To express oneself artistically is an undertaking that, in most cases, engages on a personal level. I am prepared to claim that the more profound motives for creating cannot be reached in any way other than by a subjectively-coloured language.

Closeness and distance in language

I have not engaged exclusively in subjective writing. Instead, I have experimented in juxtaposing texts from different genres. I have allowed autobiographical text fragments to engage in dialogue with more detached, analytical discourses, and poetically charged voices to confront concrete descriptions of works and processes. In this way, I have

achieved a richness in the textual processing of the project. Together, the different voices encompass the core of the project in a way that could not have been achieved by one single genre.

By allowing texts to evolve spontaneously in the genre that comes naturally, various levels of the creative process are made visible. In this approach lies an acceptance, a recognition that artistic work may originate in widely disparate aspects of human existence, and that different text genres may be needed to do justice to this fact.

Adopting an accepting attitude vis-à-vis the textual results is, in itself, an effective way of overcoming writer's block. Moreover, in my experience, this method allows intuition to influence the writing – just as it influences the artistic work. Artistic work often involves long periods of intense immersion. During such periods, it is not far-fetched to imagine that whatever appears spontaneously, the first text that comes to mind, will be relevant in one way or another. Thus, the writing will not automatically be unfocused just because it is not at all times rigorously controlled by the intellect.

The thesis-like text, with an introductory hypothesis, an objective argument and, lastly, a conclusion, obviously has its legitimate place. When conveying soberly cogitated information, elaborating on stringent intellectual discussions, and so on, academic detachment is indispensable. When it comes to really getting close to the artistic process, however, I am convinced that the traditional academic text style is inadequate. The requirements of objectivity, unambiguousness, clarity and logical consistency pertaining to academic-scientific papers actually have little in common with the driving forces behind artistic practices. The reasons for and methods of creative practices are more complex than that. In the same way that there is room for irrationality, surrealism and ambiguity in art – for the inconsistent and complex sides of human existence – one could posit that texts that aspire to describe art projects should be able to encompass the unexplainable. The way we write also determines what we can say. Therefore, I argue adamantly for the use of other text genres alongside the academic. If verbal proximity is to be achieved, the artistic process requires text genres that are more pliable, that can adapt to the essence of creativity more closely.

The reason why I have devoted time to explaining my use of a subjective approach is, of course, that my choice deviates from the norm. A detached, thesis-like paper is still the prevailing format in the field of artistic research, in Norway and internationally. Do I claim, then, that a subjective, literary or poetic tone can entirely replace the more traditionally academic text? Not at all: detachment has its purpose – just as subjective, free writing has its limitations.

One of the primary purposes of text in this kind of artistic research, in my opinion, is to shed light on the artistic-practical exploration – the knowledge production that takes place in the workshop, studio, etc. In that context, to exclusively use free, literary genres and present the reader with a written final documentation in the form of a poem or prose passage, would be like trying to explain one artistic expression by means of another. This would leave too much to the reader's own interpretation. As I argue in the

above, subjective text genres deepen our understanding of creative work, but we also need text that explains lucidly. Text that is factual, discursive and detached. Text that challenges the mind intellectually and analytically. Basically, what I propose and hope to exemplify, is a combination of free, subjective and analytically objective text genres – an interplay between detachment and closeness. Between these two categories of text a great deal of friction could well arise – and this is, in some way, what I intend. Tension and conflict gives language a chance to embrace the complexity and ambiguity of art. I think there will probably always be blind spots in descriptions of works of art and art processes. Perhaps this is meant to be. Perhaps we artists should regard this as an encouragement – that there are parts of our practices that language cannot reach.

As a consequence of my accepting approach to text, and to experimentation, parts of the written result lie beyond the project framework. I have simply produced texts that could not be used in this context, that proved to be irrelevant, either on account of their very subjectivity, or for other reasons. The fact that I chose to engage in a search for alternative verbal formats is obviously because I found it rewarding. During my time as a research fellow, I have discovered how writing can serve as a learning process in itself, while a free approach to text genres and an acceptance of a personal narrative voice brings me decidedly closer to the very core of creativity. As an artist, if I am to feel any incentive to express myself in words, this is something I do not wish to lose sight of.

Research in the arts and text as a communicator

After all, there are no art practices that are not saturated with experiences, histories and beliefs; and conversely there is no theoretical access to, or interpretation of, art practice that does not partially shape that practice into what it is. Concepts and theories, experiences and understandings are interwoven with art practices and, partly for this reason, art is always reflexive. Research in the arts hence seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object.

HENK BORGENDORFF

I have engaged in studying the role of text in communicating the knowledge generated in connection with artistic research. How closely or loosely can, or should, the practical-artistic and theoretic-written work be tied to one another? And where do we expect the emphasis of the R&D to lie?

There could, on the one hand, conceivably be a weak or non-existent link between the artistic and written research. The text, for instance, could form an independent art historic or theoretical research contribution that relates only on an abstract level to the artistic research. The disadvantage of this is that any crucial development in the artistic part of the project would not be discussed or even translated into verbal language. Thereby, the artistic work loses visibility, while a large part of its applicability is forfeited. At worst, the art is entirely subordinated to the theoretical research and reduced to a by-product in the context.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have research where the text is closely linked to the practical-thematic artistic practice. The creative work is the main focus, and this is where development is expected to take place. The role of the text is then to communicate, translate and place the artistic practice in a broader cognitive framework. On the other hand, the written work is not expected to deliver an independent research contribution.

It hardly needs to be said that I wish to affiliate myself with the latter example. The purpose of text in my project is to report on the artistic development – to follow the creative process like a shadow. That is why I have referred to this paper as a companion text. Even if I have endeavoured fundamentally to regard both the practical and the written activities as potential knowledge production, the primary purpose of the text has never been to engender new knowledge, new theories, through independent reasoning. It has been vital to maintain a focus on the artistic exploration.

Thus, my research lies very close to what Henk Borgdorff (2006) calls “research in the arts”. He describes this as a form of artistic research and development, where the artistic practice is an essential part of both the research process and the research result. In contrast with the theoretical detachment required for “research on the arts” (not unlike the position an art historian or art theoretician is expected to assume), and the utilitarian aspect associated with “research for the arts” (for instance, in the form of technical

studies of materials), “research in the arts” emphasises the knowledge production inherent in the artistic processes themselves. In current debate, this is the most controversial and challenged model. For, when does art production *per se* qualify as research, and when does it not? For me, putting words to the creative processes has, to a large degree, constituted the difference between the research fellowship period and my usual artistic practice.

My grandmother lived alone in a large house in the countryside. We would drive out there in the summer, dressed in our Sunday best – flowery skirts and white blouses. The car was sweltering. Lupines grew at the side of the road.

The house stood alone, framed on three sides by a thick pine forest. In front of the house the forest had been cleared, a wide meadow now stretched all the way down to the brook.

It was a beautiful two-story house. Yellow and well-proportioned. It was fronted by a spacious glass porch that served as the main entrance. We used to sit there during the summers, having fruit punch and coffee, strawberries and ice cream, at a large table with a crocheted lace tablecloth. The old windowpanes distorted the light causing the world outside to undulate in synch with our movements. To the sides, one could just make out the dark forest. Over time, the porch was transformed into a storage space. Upon entering, we would walk in a line along a cleared path through the middle of the tightly packed glass prism.

Also indoors, beyond the glass porch, the house gradually became cluttered with things. It was like entering a cave. Rooms crammed with furniture, lamps and knick-knacks. The wooden floors were covered with several layers of rugs, the tables had double layers of tablecloths. Furniture and books were lined up against the walls. Every flat surface was heaped with newspapers, folded clothing, potted plants, woven baskets and ceramic bowls, plastic bags containing half-finished handicraft projects, large plaster sculptures and smaller ones in wood and glass, decorative cushions, bundles of letters, photographs, important documents and old shopping lists, small mirrors, boxes of stamps, spectacles, fountain pens, vases with meadow flowers, dead flies.

A wide, creaking staircase led up to the second floor. Up there, it was darker and dustier, the ceiling was lower and there were fewer things. The children's old bedrooms lay upstairs. This is where I found the box. A varnished, reddish-brown, wooden box with drawers – a wide one at the bottom and two narrow ones at the top. The drawer knobs had fallen off, leaving tiny yellowy-white plastic plugs. There was something missing from the top of the box. A small mirror, perhaps.

I chose the box that time when we were each allowed to take an item. There was not enough space for drawings in the standard A4 format. The drawers were too small for letters too, but it was the largest object I dared take.



The only instrument that a human being has at his disposal for coping with time is memory [.]

JOSEPH BRODSKY

Memory as a phenomenon fascinates me: how we are thrown into a temporal reality, and how this affects us. I am fascinated by how memories shape our consciousness, how time appears to linger in us humans in the form of reminiscences of the concrete reality in which we have existed. How all individuals could be said, in this way, to carry their own personal backgrounds with them.

In my research fellowship project I have chosen to dwell on the memory-bearing aspect of used objects. The connection between material objects in our surroundings and the personal history experienced first-hand by the individual is a theme that has fused my artistic and written work.

Objects as memory-bearers

Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are.

DAVID CARR

Objects from our private sphere evoke feelings and connect us to our past. They are tangible reminders of what has been; the history of ourselves, our family or relatives, our private or cultural, historical background. Many of these associations are unique and personal, of course, but some can be said to be if not universal then at least shared by individuals from the same cultural sphere. In this way, even the most commonplace object can hold the key to an inner world. The poetry of everyday things, borne by the memories and stories of these objects – that is the theme on which my research fellowship project centres.

There are several levels to this thematic field of interest. Firstly, I am fascinated and inspired, as mentioned, by objects as guardians of personal life stories, as elements that create continuity in life. But I am also more pragmatically engrossed in the memory theme, simply as an aspect that is vital to the reading of my works. I hasten to add, however, that my works are expressly concerned with memory as a phenomenon – there

is no autobiographical content in my works. Our associations and reactions are always based on experiences, on the things we have been through and remember. As long as my works are mainly created by modifying familiar objects, and the beholder's reactions are thus coloured by the memories he or she has of these objects, the memory theme remains relevant.

Our inner objects

But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways; we would recapture the reflexes of the "first stairway," we would not stumble on that rather high step.

GASTON BACHELARD

Something we see can serve to wake us up, be a conduit to an inner world. In that sense, objects in our surroundings can trigger memories. But sometimes, no visual catalyst is needed; some objects or settings are so vivid in our memory that they are constantly present or easily evoked without external reminders. Our minds are inhabited by memories of materials and actual objects, and in that way, our surroundings eventually become a part of us, a part of who we are.

When describing the significance of private belongings, the social meaning of objects is given a great deal of attention, i.e. their identity-forming, status-reflecting or self-asserting properties. In these contexts, the objects are regarded primarily as an intermediary, a means towards an end – they have a set role in a social game. But the object relationships that interest me are rarely of such a directly instrumental nature. I am just as fascinated by situations where the objects appear to have no particular purpose, situations where the objects, and the memories associated with them, have become part of the sub-conscious, and how this influences us both mentally and physically, for instance as the ingrained organic habits Bachelard refers to.

The memory theme as inspiration and backdrop

Those ten-foot-high, two-story chests (you'd have to take off the corniced top from the elephant-footed bottom when moving) housed nearly everything our family had amassed in the course of its existence. The role played elsewhere by the attic or the basement, in our case was performed by the chests. My father's various cameras, developing and printing paraphernalia, prints themselves, dishes, china, linen, tablecloths, shoe boxes with his shoes now too small for him yet still too large for me, tools, batteries, his old Navy tunics, binoculars, family albums, yellowed illustrated supplements, my mother's hats and scarves, some silver Solingen razor blades, defunct flashlights, his military decorations, her motley kimonos, their mutual correspondence, lorgnettes, fans, other memorabilia – all that was stored in the cavernous depths of these chests, yielding, when you'd open one of their doors, a bouquet of mothballs, old leather, and dust. On top of the lower part, as if on a mantelpiece, sat two crystal carafes containing liqueurs, and a glazed porcelain figurine of two tipsy Chinese fishermen dragging their catch. My mother would wipe the dust off them twice a week.

With hindsight, the content of these chests could be compared to our joined, collective subconscious; at the time, this thought wouldn't have crossed my mind. To say the least, all these things were part of my parents' consciousness, tokens of their memory: of places and of times by and large preceding me; of their common and separate past, of their own youth and childhood, of a different era, almost of a different century.

JOSEPH BRODSKY

Instead of approaching the memory theme as a problem to be solved, I have dwelled on it more unconditionally, without expectations of any conclusion. My study has been of a subjective nature. For instance, I have explored a fictional style of writing, in which my own memories of objects and materials have played a central part. The object memory theme came to serve partly as a zone where my works find their thematic roots in a broader life-related landscape, and partly as a field in which I find mental stimulation and inspiration.

Admittedly, I entered into this project with the ambition to perform a thematic-theoretical study of the subject of objects and memories, parallel with the artistic work. I envisioned something resembling the format of an academic paper. My idea was that since the subject spontaneously aroused my interest, an independent theoretical study would benefit the artistic research, even if the two were not directly related to one another. I devoted some time at the beginning of the project to reviewing relevant literature on the subject. Within the broad field covered by the umbrella concept of 'material culture studies', I found an abundance of references.³ However, I also came across interesting literature written from other perspectives, including philosophical, psychological or fictional

3 A few examples worth mentioning are *Wild Things* by Judy Attfield (2000), *Death, Memory & Material Culture* by Elizabeth Hallam & Jenny Hockney (2001), and *The Comfort of Things* by Daniel Miller (2008).

works.⁴ Among the fictional references, I was particularly captivated by the Russian-American poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky. His writing reflects on time, and how we are affected by time. The role of memories in human existence is a recurrent subject, and he often portrays private belongings as bearers of memories, guardians of the past. I felt an immediate affinity with both the subject and the language in these texts – where what is down-to-earth and concrete naturally coexists with what is existential, where things were allowed to be what they were, and how this was facilitated by the tone of the text. Musing was allowed to be musing – without any expectation on language to take it anywhere, towards resolution.

I soon realised that my hypothesis would not be sufficiently interesting as a purely academic exercise. Some of the original questions of my project proved to be banally easy to answer, while others were impossible. The question concerning the role of objects in our surroundings in creating continuity in life, in the construction of a coherent life story, for instance, is actually very easy to answer. Objects are very important, it almost goes without saying – and it is not hard to find scientific research supporting that statement. But merely having the answer was far from satisfactory. The fact is that the answer didn't make the question less interesting – as inspiration, as a thematic point of departure. In this attempt at a strictly theoretical study, there was little that ultimately provided any real stimulation to the artistic part of the project. And after all, that was my primary focus – pursuing an academic exercise for its own sake thus appeared pointless to me.

Although my questions were not sufficiently interesting *as questions*, they played a vital part in the process. What they did was to stake out, at an early stage in the project, the thematic field I would explore. They guided me into the sphere in which the research would take place. But I was not in pursuit of answers. On the contrary, it was open-ended utterances that interested me – statements that invited reflection, in which I could *become*, look around, ramble on. Consequently, I switched to another strategy for the thematic endeavour: the written references would enhance the conceptual dimension of the project. The thematic exploration should inspire the artistic research. This was its purpose. If it failed to do so, it was not relevant to the project.

So, are these ideas about memories and objects visible in any way in the works I produce? To what extent does this theme impact on the actual artistic research? I can see that an external theme such as this could add value for a beholder who is interested in my works to start with. It provides a deeper insight into the thought process behind my works. But the memory theme is not necessarily *visible* in the works. That is also not important to me.

3 *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard (1958/64), *Time, Narrative, and History* by David Carr (1986), *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (1981), and *The Emotional Self: A Sociocultural Exploration* by Deborah Lupton (1998) are examples of a philosophical and psychological perspective respectively. Perhaps the most famous fictional reference is delivered by Marcel Proust, in his sensual description of the effects of a Madeleine cake on the narrator in the novel *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way* (1913).

First and foremost, this theme is something that is relevant to me personally; it constitutes a motivating and supporting factor in my work. By concentrating on a smaller section of reality – in this case, the part of reality that concerns everyday objects and how they give people a sense of context and continuity – the project attains focus and aim. This gives my work a background and a concrete interface, a kind of impact point, in a specific aspect of human existence.

This has not, however, meant that the thematic exploration would enter into the studio and determine developments there. The purpose of the theme has never been that it should control or in any way restrict the artistic dimension. Seeing art as something that can or should illustrate, communicate or otherwise serve as a channel for the thematic or theoretical parts of the research project would be problematic. Such a simplistic communication of a message would entail a radical reduction of the artwork's potential, and works of that kind rarely live up to expectations on either complexity or integrity. Therefore, I have insisted that the artistic research progresses on its own terms and does not adapt itself to predetermined intellectual arguments. The object of the thematic exploration has been to serve the artistic work, not the reverse. I have endeavoured to give enough scope to the artistic development. I have sought to ensure that the work in the studio is conducted on art's own conditions – based on observations and considerations that are thoroughly rooted in visual, concrete reality. This freedom is indispensable; when I enter the studio I should do so unencumbered by external directives.

I am seated at my grandmother's new, round dining table. It is new because she has just moved from her house in the country to a small flat in the city. The chairs are also new, upholstered. From where I am seated, I have a clear view of the kitchenette. Grandmother is treating us to a little something. Always a little something. And always the small plates. We each get one. They all have the same landscape. I quickly turn the plate so that the landscape is positioned in the right direction. It shows a man fishing, water, trees, clouds – flowers along the edges. We never talk about the images on the plates.



Art research has to do with communication, but not in the traditional, linear form. It has more to do with exploring a field.

ASLAUG NYRNES

Is it possible to speak of knowledge specifically linked to artistic work? What characterises that form of knowledge production? And how do we attain it? The knowledge, insight and experience generated in day-to-day, practical work in the studio/workshop etc are typical examples of such specific knowledge. In my project, I have striven to verbalise these processes, to “open up my head”, so to speak, and let the beholder follow my thoughts as I work.

Art is created through a sequence of major and minor decisions. In these concrete, visual, tactile, practical, conceptual and aesthetic considerations, we find what could be called the artist’s expertise. This is knowledge that is not directly accessible to anyone else; it is the practitioner’s own territory. The term “tacit knowledge” is often used to describe this knowledge field. This gives the field a mystical aura. “Tacit knowledge” implies a special intimacy with the work, it consists of knowledge that is hard to verbalise and thus hard to convey to others. I believe this is a modified truth. Most things can be expressed in words if we really want to – including artistic processes. And the artist has nothing to lose by such a demystification. Making this tacit knowledge visible, for instance, by using more adaptable and detailed language, would instead demonstrate the underlying specialised skills and experiences needed for creative work.

My research has included in-depth study of an artistic field with which I was already familiar. Since my Masters studies at Bergen National Academy of the Arts in 2001-2003, I have been working with second-hand ceramic material, mainly plates bought at flea markets and in second-hand shops. My working method is relatively straight-forward. I modify the objects directly by carving into them, sanding them down or modifying them in other ways.

The starting point for my work is the capacity of old objects to turn our gaze to the past, to point back at their own life stories. This symbolic link to the past that imbues second-hand objects fascinates me. Like photographs, clothes and other vestiges of lives past, these items bear the traces of an unknown individual. By physically reworking the material I seek to enhance the stories held by these objects.

In the project I have striven to expand my exploration of ceramic second-hand material as a starting-point for artistic work. I have wanted to push the limits of the material – to see how far in expression I could go – what narratives, angles and themes I could cull from this material. I was curious about the parts of this field that were yet unexplored, that I knew nothing about. Since I wanted to consider the material’s immanent meanings, it

was vital for me to approach it with a degree of openness, without too many preconceived notions. I trusted that if I remained here, in this material, and allowed it to speak to me, development would proceed, step by step.

In both my own art and in that of others, I value an element of surprise. Perceptive ambiguity interests me – whatever makes us stop, look more closely, marvel. This sense of wonder triggers a mental reaction, it encourages us to review our habitual thinking. In visual contexts, this element of wonder serves to wake us up, make us see things in a new light, discover new connections.

In my work I try out various physical manipulations of the objects. This is a method in which periods of concrete experimentation is followed by careful observation, repeated considerations, small adjustments, then more observation, and so on. I am usually, if not always, dependent on having a visual result to relate to. Before I have that, I know nothing whatsoever about the quality of the idea I am working on. I simply have to see the result in order to evaluate it – or even to know what the work is about, what it says.





A few words on technique

I have developed my own method for manipulating ceramic second-hand material. I carve, sand, engrave or sculpt the material directly. This is a technique I have been experimenting with since my Masters studies (Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2001-03). Originally, I used plain, hand-held so-called multifunction or rotary tools. In order to have more control, I soon went on to rotary tools with a “flexible shaft”. These models have a separate motor, often on a stand. The hand-held part of the tool is attached to the motor via a flexible shaft. In this way I do not have the weight of the motor in my hand. The hand-held piece is usually no larger than a pen and can be operated fairly easily and accurately.⁵ I use diamond mounted engraving points, that is, metal points of various dimensions covered with diamond particles.⁶ The engraving creates hazardous ceramic dust, and requires good ventilation and adequate protective gear.⁷

This is a relatively simple and accessible method for reworking fired ceramic material with a sculptor’s approach. It does have its limitations, however. As we know, porcelain and stoneware are hard materials. But not all ceramic materials are as hard. Most of the objects I process are creamware. Like the older faience, creamware is an unsintered clay that turns white when fired. It was invented in Britain in the mid-1700s and was widely used in European factories well into the 20th century. It is fired at approximately 1,200°C and maintains its porosity even after being fired. Thus, one way of identifying creamware is that it is glazed all over and fired on stilts. As raw material for the kind of direct processing I do, creamware is ideal. Various kinds of earthenware, or any other

5 Over the past year, I have used equipment of the brand Foredom. Previous to this, I had gone through a large number of rotary tools of varying quality, by various manufacturers, including Dremel, Co-Tech and others.

6 I use the cheapest engraving points I can find, since they wear down and need to be replaced frequently.

7 Dust masks with a P3 particle filter are recommended for this type of work. I use a full breathing mask with assisted ventilation made by Scott, and work under a direct extractor fitted above my worktable.



low-fired ceramic material, can also be used. However, some ceramics are unsuitable for manipulation using the methods described above, because they are too hard. I rarely use porcelain or modern stoneware for that reason.

During my time as a research fellow, I performed my first experiments with sandblasting.⁸ Sandblasting is a method whereby the surface of the object is sanded off using fine sand and compressed air. This technique is commonly used for decorative effects by glasswork studios. Light sandblasting gives the glass objects a matte, opaque finish. In industry, sandblasting is also used frequently to remove paint and clean metal surfaces.

Sandblasting involves using a compressed air gun to spray sand at high pressure at an object or surface. Processing of small objects is usually carried out inside a sealed sandblasting cabinet, to prevent the sand from going everywhere. Inside the cabinet, the sand circulates in a closed system from the nozzle, down through a grid in the floor of the cabinet, via a hose back to the sandblasting gun. The object and the gun are handled using a pair of long rubber gloves that are inserted through holes in the cabinet wall. The process can be viewed through a glass window at the top.

Surfaces that are not to be sandblasted are protected with tape, self-adhesive plastic film, glue, etc. I use ordinary water-soluble PVA glue to mask. The sand eats into the unprotected glazed surfaces but bounces off the elastic adhesive layer.

A problem I often encounter when I sand off decor by hand is that the glaze edges become uneven. Small flakes of glaze tend to chip off when the engraving point moves along the contour. This does not happen with sandblasting, and the line between the saved-out and sandblasted areas is razor-sharp. This was the positive surprise.

⁸ This work was carried out at S12, a glass studio with a gallery and open workshop in central Bergen.

The negative surprise was that when all the glaze has been stripped off, and the sand begins to eat into the clay surface, any structural unevenness in the clay is revealed. The sand does not leave a smooth surface. The sandblasting has a stronger effect on softer areas, and the ceramic surface ends up resembling burlled fleece fabric.

This uneven surface texture is not suitable for my works, it adds an unintended visual disturbance. Therefore, I have to finish by smoothing down the ceramic surfaces by hand. Sandblasting speeds up my work, and visually complex patterns such as those in my most recent series, *Going Blank Again*, would have been impossible for me to produce without this technique. It would simply not be viable in terms of time. But the process is still time-consuming, due to the extensive post-processing.

During my three-year research fellowship, I have worked on seven different series of works: *Blue & White Landscape Multiple*, *Knick knacks*, *Under Blue Skies*, *Collection of Stains*, *Damaged Goods*, *Unidentified View* and *Going Blank Again*. Each series is based on a pre-determined processing strategy to be applied to a related group of objects. The strategy is often formulated as an instruction to myself, for instance: "Remove all the blue from the plate." I usually work on one object at a time and rarely develop more than two series simultaneously. Each series has presented me with challenges of various kinds, and has stimulated me to reflect in different ways. In the following, I will discuss how I dealt with these challenges and the thoughts that arose in the course of the work.





Blue & White Landscape Multiple, 2008-09
From the series *Rose Border Multiple*
Ceramic second-hand material, openings cut using a rotary tool
Collection Museum of Art and Design, New York (left piece)

Blue & White Landscape Multiple – subjective and universal in the cultural-historical context of an object

Objects from the private sphere can be seen as a bridge into an individual's world of memories. Some objects, moreover, have been so widely spread that a larger group of people, one or more generations within a particular cultural sphere, for instance, may have a relationship to them. This is true of one of my most important raw materials: plates decorated with landscape prints. These objects are particularly suitable as starting-points for artistic work, simply because they are likely to resonate with a large number of viewers. I have no hopes of “reading” the viewers’ thoughts or reactions however. Any memories that are awakened in them are of a subjective nature. Memories can never be anything but subjective.

Thus, the broader cultural and historical context of an object does not automatically influence how it is experienced and, ultimately, remembered. An object's cultural, historical background is not externally visible. It is something that you have to be familiar with, be informed of, in order for it to have any influence. The memories and stories associated with objects from the private sphere are generally based on the directly-experienced everyday life, situations and events that rarely concern the object's more general cultural-historical background.

Rose Border Multiple is a series that I had been working on before I started my research fellowship. It all started with the Finnish dinner service *Maisema* (Landscape) manufactured by Arabia in 1882-1975. The motif, a pastoral landscape with a floral border, was based on British designs. Similar, often blue-and-white, copperplate-decorated sets have been produced in most European countries.

Since Arabia's *Maisema* has been in production for so many years, the service is found in many homes belonging to older generations in Finland. Most countries take pride in their domestic ceramic output – as in this case. The *Maisema* service is regarded as being typically Finnish – “it's genuine Arabia”.

This seemed paradoxical to me. When you start to study an object such as this, you soon discover how intertwined our cultural history is. Firstly, it becomes clear that the depicted landscape is a fictive composition bearing no relation to any existing Finnish landscape. The fact is that Arabia took the design from its Swedish parent company, Rörstrand, where exactly the same pattern had been used. The technique of transferring a copperplate print to ceramic goods was developed in Britain in the 1740s and was at its most popular in the 19th and 20th centuries. The technique involves pressing a print from the engraved copperplate onto the unglazed ceramic object so that the ink is transferred to the object. This method made it possible to decorate large quantities of ceramic goods with a whole range of patterns, and was vital to the development of the European ceramic industry. Rörstrand originally obtained the copperplates for its production from England, and *Maisema* is a direct adaptation of the popular English motif *British Scenery*. If we retrace the history of blue-and-white porcelain even further back in time, we end up in the Far East, with its ancient tradition of decorating porcelain objects with cobalt oxide. Porcelain is generally assumed to originate in China. In the 14th century, the development of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain boomed. At this time, the secret behind the porcelain – kaolin clay and the high firing temperatures – was unknown in Europe. Therefore, porcelain was a luxury commodity, and vast quantities of Chinese and Japanese china were imported in the 17th and 18th centuries. These products were often adapted to the European market and could, as a result, be decorated with European-influenced pictorial elements, besides the traditional Chinese motifs. Correspondingly, Oriental imagery continued to be used in European decors even after the secret of porcelain-making had been discovered in Meissen, Germany, in 1709, and it was no longer necessary for that reason to import Chinese porcelain.

This background tells me something about the function of the decors on 20th century ceramic utility goods. It reveals a longing for exoticism, and how consumer goods tried to satisfy this need by stimulating daydreaming. It is natural to assume that motifs of this kind were produced to satisfy a demand. But to what extent was this demand a construction? I cannot help thinking that my grandmother and her peers deserved motifs that were slightly more reality-based – relating to their everyday surroundings, their lives.

While these objects can nonetheless be said to have a Finnish connection, this is not a question of “authenticity” but simply a result of their physical presence over time. They have been a part of the Finnish cultural sphere so long that they have *become* national symbols. They have been pounded into the collective conscious until it would be wrong to claim that they were not part of our cultural history, the Finnish national character.

Many of the objects I work with have this rich cultural background, which means that they are “charged” with meaning. In that way, I can count on the objects causing reactions, triggering associations, in the beholder. Obviously, I cannot control these thoughts, nor is that my intention. Which aspect of the object’s contents that is emphasised depends on the perspective of each individual. One person may be particularly interested in the cultural history of the plates – and then that element will be decisive to the reading. Another person may have childhood memories linked to a particular object – and then that would naturally influence how it is experienced.

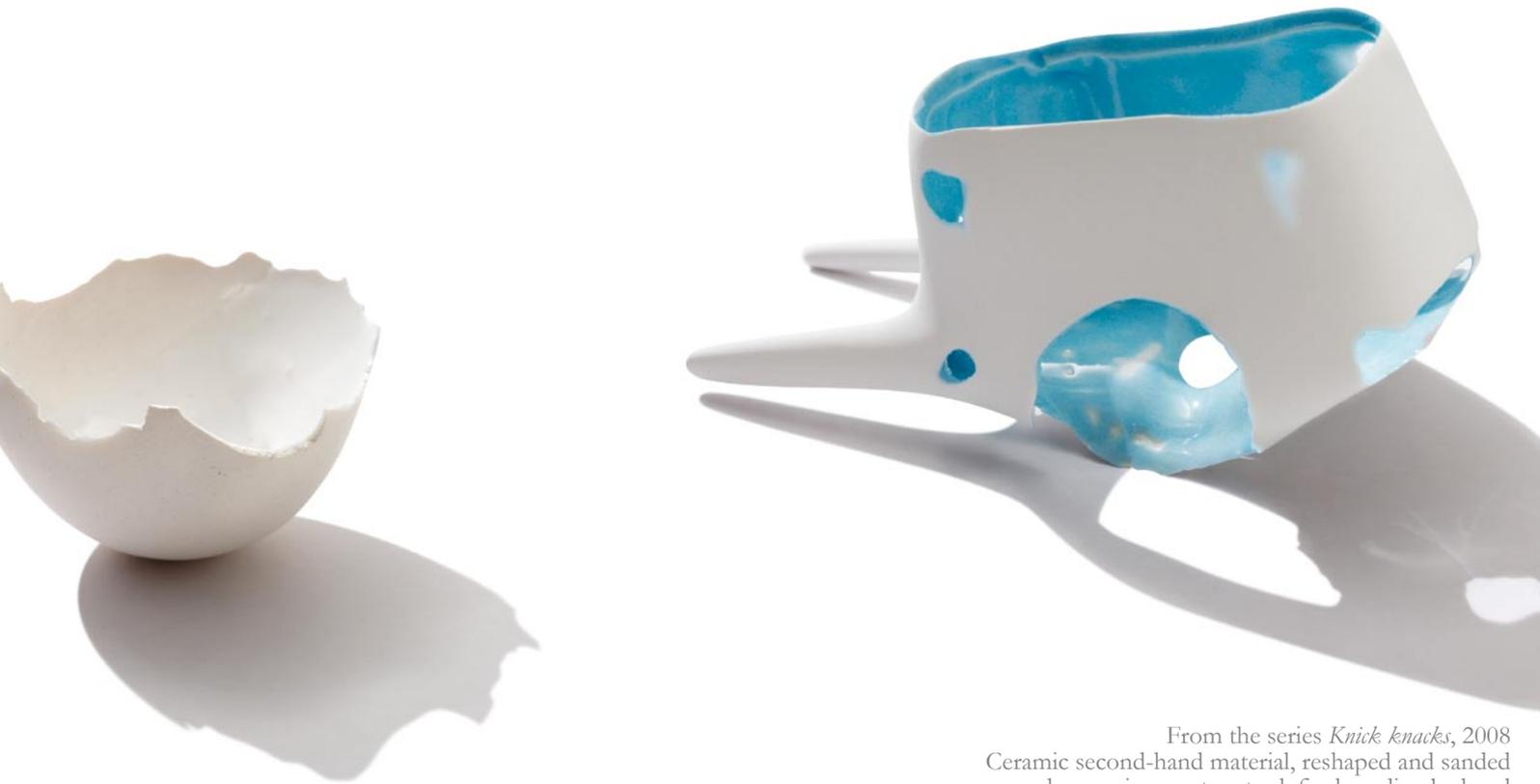
For me personally, the more general cultural history is rarely my main focus. Instead, my attention is drawn to the private sphere, to events and phenomena on the individual level. “Who has used this plate?” I find myself asking. “Why is it so stained? Who designed the motif? What thoughts passed through the minds of those who used the plate, who studied the pictures? Did they imagine their own stories based on the pictures? Were they annoyed by them? Did they arouse indifference or fascination? Did they ever discuss them?” In the profoundly personal I see a potential to approach issues of a universal nature. I aim at the core of human existence that we all share, that is the same regardless of cultural, economic, social or experience-based differences. In that way, the subjective domain appears far from being a restricted space to dwell in.

The cultural-historical context I have outlined here is relevant in that it provides a fullness of data around the objects I use as raw material. However, I have not intentionally highlighted the historical background of the objects as part of the contents of my works. I have not, in that sense, worked from a plan relating to the communication of content. In fact, this is practically the opposite to my method: first I do – then I examine what my modifications communicate. In my works, I strive increasingly to achieve transformations that do not favour one particular reading, but which facilitate multiple associations, multiple narratives. I want to make way for an interpretative openness, so that the frame through which the objects are normally viewed is changed or expanded.

In the series *Rose Border Multiple* I stacked landscape plates from different times and different factories. Through holes cut in the middle sections of the plates it is possible to see through the different layers. As a result of the stacking, a new landscape emerges – in the perforated middle section the different motifs are blended. The series has progressed from a simple format, two plates, one stacked on the other, to a more complex format, with eight stacked plates. *Blue & White Landscape Multiple* consists of the last two works in the series. In a spirit of what could almost literally be called an in-depth study, I wanted to explore whether this idea would benefit from a greater degree of complexity.

While the blue work in *Blue & White Landscape Multiple* was basically a repetition of an older idea, albeit with more layers than previously, the white work was a new variation. It stemmed from a longing for simplicity, for something white and bare. Since I was working here with undecorated plates, with no pictorial information of their own, multiple layers were required to produce a sufficiently detailed, readable drawing. The contour line of the cut-out holes was the sole provider of pictorial data. Everything that needed to be conveyed for the illusion of a landscape motif to be sufficiently strong had to be there. In hindsight, I note that this white version continues to elude me. Perhaps this is merely because my first attempt was not entirely successful – there is potential for improvement. The middle section, for instance, would have benefited from retaining more detail, and the work as a whole would therefore have benefited from more layers. I chose, however, not to devote more time to perfecting this idea, since it was, after all, based on a previous series of works and did not deliver the artistic renewal I was after.





From the series *Knick Knacks*, 2008
Ceramic second-hand material, reshaped and sanded
down using a rotary tool, final sanding by hand

Knick Knacks – balancing familiarity and enigma

The tension between the familiar and the enigmatic, between the ordinary and the unexpected, fascinates me. In practice, this involves a constant balancing act between subtle transformation and over-elaboration. How much, or how little, modification is required? At what point does the modification cut off the link to the object's original meaning and drain the work of its charge?

These issues occupied me as I worked on the *Knick Knacks* series. Knick knacks are objects of little value. I had long had the ambition to work with objects other than plates. In my search I came across the category of souvenirs and ornaments. The most interesting aspect of this kind of object is how despised it is. Knick knacks are dismissed categorically as rubbish – as the ultimate symbol of bad taste. Nevertheless, they are remnants of our man-made world. These objects are obviously manufactured and sold, since they turn up in second-hand shops.

Can these objects be rescued from their pitiful existence and bestowed with at least a vestige of self-respect? Can I give them a more “neutral objectness” by simply processing them to the extent that they lose their character, become unrecognisable? Could they, in that way, be “elevated” from their specific purpose – becoming material enigmas that only vaguely hint at everyday existence? Can I make something worthless valuable, something banal sacred?

Plates are like pictures. They are easy to transform from something intended primarily as a utility object, into something that is only for looking at. In that respect, they are “easy” objects to work with. I can process plates as I would any pictorial surface, without considering their reference to utility. That is not the case with other ceramic utility objects, such as teapots, cups, saltcellars – all of which are potential raw material to me. The more distinctly three-dimensional the object, the harder it is not to associate it with its specific use.

Even though it is the object that interests me, and although I insist on the three-dimensionality even of a blank sheet of A4 paper, most of my manipulations are based on a rearrangement of the object’s pictorial, two-dimensional information. In *Knick Knacks* I went slightly further in my redesigning than before. My idea was to create a set of objects that would balance between familiarity and vagueness, between commonplace and mystery. I carefully examined how various physical alterations affected the *perception* of change in the objects. For instance, changing the object’s base so that it leaned to one side was a sure way of achieving a major perceptual change by small means. Apart from that, the objects could take a great deal of physical alteration. Usually, drastic changes to their design were needed before they even approached formlessness and were “elevated”, so to speak, from their normal status. For the sake of variety, I complemented the series with objects that were either only slightly modified, or radically altered – objects where only a thin shard remained, set against entirely intact objects where only the glaze had been sanded off. I was looking for a composition of objects where the more figurative ones served as clues and the nearly obliterated, formless parts were intriguing and gave the series an enigmatic quality.

During my fellowship period, I have completed and presented this series as a finished work. However, it is a typical example of the kind of work I have found difficult to assess. Both while I was working on the series and for a long period after completion, I have asked myself if there was anything of interest here. There is something here that does not work, but where is the weakness? Perhaps it is simply the idea that is not up to standard. Maybe, the concept in itself is too simple, and consequently, the crucial complexity is absent.





From the series *Under Blue Skies*, 2009
Ceramic second-hand material,
glaze removed using a rotary tool, final sanding by hand
Private collection, Norway (left piece)
Collection The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art (right piece)

Under Blue Skies – on curiosity and working serially

I often work serially. This comes naturally to me and is linked to my curiosity.

I usually start with a formulated method, a particular way of modifying a particular raw material. If the strategy works, I repeat the modification for as long as it interests me. In that way, one could say that my curiosity is my main driving force. The small variations in the end result are vital – they are what keep my interest alive. These variations are caused partly by differences in the source material, and partly by changes in my processing. In that way, I avoid the sequence of works becoming pointlessly repetitive. On the contrary, repetition is necessary to show the full potential of the idea. The works in a series are produced with the same strategy, and yet they are not identical. They resemble each other more like family members, rather than as mechanically reproduced copies.

Whether an idea, a mode of processing, will work is something I don't know in advance. I don't know until I've seen it. I may have an inkling of the effects of my modifications, but exactly what makes something visually interesting has proved hard to predict. Consequently, when a modification strategy works, it is often for other reasons than those I envisioned. As a rule, unexpected effects arise, and usually it is these surprises that spur me on.

In the series *Under Blue Skies*, my intention was to isolate one of the pictorial elements in the landscapes by sanding down all the surrounding areas. By accentuating one single detail in the overloaded decor, I wanted to make the narrative element clearer. When one detail is left in this way on an otherwise blank surface, it is as though we are seeing it properly for the first time. Space for visual interpretation is opened up around it. We can imagine things about the detail. It can have a life, there is room for activity here.

This series is a direct elaboration on an idea I have worked on previously. My *Gone Fishing* series (2007-) was based on an easily identified pictorial element: the boat. This time, I wanted to look more closely at a more ambiguous, yet more overlooked, detail – clouds. I was looking for a less rigid narrative reading, and the clouds also appealed to me visually. It appeared that the clouds were only there to fill a space that would otherwise be empty.

I chose to keep the white area of sky surrounding the clouds. The area I left was thus encircled by a contour where shiny glaze met bare clay surface. Traces of the removed pictorial elements could be seen in the contour: a horizon, a building, a tree, a floral border. I was surprised that this line became so prominent. The line between shiny and matte, with all the information that could be gathered from the undulation of the line, became the main focus of the works. For me, my work on this series came to be about reading visual information – about how a detail that is difficult to read, a bearer of information that can only barely be decoded, has the capacity to attract the gaze and captivate attention.





From the series *Collection of Stains*, 2009
Ceramic second-hand material,
pattern engraved on reverse of plate,
details stained with food substances

Collection of Stains & Damaged Goods – the importance of dichotomy

The ideas behind my works are often based on dichotomy, a central contrast around which the work is constructed. When I succeed, the work becomes at the same time clear, as though permeated with light – and full of ambiguity. That the work does not contain several contrasting elements but just one specific dichotomy makes the focus more distinct. This is a recurring fundamental concept in my work. Whether an idea works in practice or not depends to a great extent on this perceived dichotomy – how it is realised, and whether the two parts of the dichotomy become equally strong, attain the same expressive weight.

Frequent dichotomies in my work are: high and low, valuable and worthless, decorative and repulsive. In practice, this may involve subjecting an insignificant object to a meticulous, time-consuming treatment, or decorating with repulsive, low materials. The contrast is there to disrupt a routine viewing, to inspire a more observant gaze. It urges the viewer not to take the visual impressions for granted.

Collection of Stains is a series of works I began during my fellowship. Parts of it have been exhibited, but I am not sure it has proceeded beyond the experimental stage. My idea was to “decorate” ceramic material using staining food substances as my only source of colour. What looked like stereotypical floral patterns were, in fact, oils, coffee, tea,

vegetable and meat juices that had been absorbed through the back of the plate and eventually appeared as a kind of under-glaze painting. Conceptually, the logic of the work appealed to me: plate decorations consisting of leftover food, as if the food that had been served on the plates had sunk in naturally and settled in coiling floral patterns.

My technique was to carve a selected floral design on the back of the plate. The lines cut through to the porous clay body so that the liquids could seep in. The plates reacted differently to the staining; both the ware and the glazes proved to influence the visible result. All the plates used were of creamware, and yet there were considerable differences in how the staining liquids were absorbed. I experimented with various food substances: tomato purée, blueberry soup and beetroot juice, coffee, tea, meat sauce and mackerel in tomato. Most colours eventually turned brown. In order to make the patterns more distinct, I used the darkest possible liquids. Water-soluble foodstuffs dispersed more easily in the ceramics, occasionally colouring the whole plate light brown. Therefore, I came to prefer oil-based or oil-mixed stains, which gave more distinct results – the colours kept to the lines and gave saturated, watercolour-like shades.

Technically, this is the most demanding series I have worked on. To achieve any precision in the lines on the front of the plate, I had to carve so deep into the back that I sometimes came right through to the glaze on the other side. If the cut was too shallow, the stain spread to such a wide area that it formed thick, smudgy lines. In order to judge how close I am to the other side, I hold the plate up to the light. The amount of light shining through reveals the thickness of the ceramic ware. When, as in this case, I was trying to cut as deeply as possible, I occasionally went straight through and the object had to be discarded.

Considering that I really stretched my technical skills to produce this series, it is slightly ironic that the end result turned out as it did. The main reason why this series did not progress past the experimental stage is that I never achieved sufficient precision in the staining. The contradiction on which this work was based – delicacy against repulsion, the floral motif and the residue of food – required that the decoration appeared truly delicate, well-executed and refined. The imprecision of the decor meant that the contrast was not achieved – there was no real dichotomy between two equally strong elements.





From the series *Damaged Goods*, 2009
Plastic plates, pattern engraved with paper knife

In *Damaged Goods*, another series that stayed at the experimental stage, the problem was virtually the opposite. My basic idea was partly the same as for *Collection of Stains*, a series of plates decorated with a familiar flaw, a fault in the material. The raw material here was plastic plates, which, as everyone knows, get scratched from wear and tear. A scratch in a dark plastic plate appears lighter, almost white. On the blue plastic plate, therefore, I have worked exclusively on the white fields of the Willow Pattern. I stuck a copy of the Willow Pattern to the back of the slightly translucent plate as a template for my work. Using a paper knife, I then carved the pattern into the plate as meticulously as possible. For the white plate, I transferred the motif onto it using tracing paper, carved the pattern with a paper knife and then finally stained it with tea.

The series ended after these two works. The problem this time was that the precision was too convincing. I had achieved a *trompe l'oeil* effect, and the plates could easily be mistaken for genuine china. When the scratches were no longer isolated, one by one, they were not experienced as flaws, aberrations, failures. They were just lines, like any other, in a detailed drawing. Again, the ambiguity, and thus the tension, was absent.







From the series *Unidentified View*, 2009
Ceramic second-hand material, sandblasted, sculpted and
sanded down using a rotary tool, final sanding by hand
Private collections, Norway

Unidentified View – an essay in intimacy

The palm of the hand is an erogenous zone, you say. Like an opening into the body. Whatever touches the palm touches the soul.

I am fascinated by small formats, slowness and sensitivity. My work contains a good measure of exercises to perceive slight nuances, how to focus on the intimate. Like a great deal of the material-based art that interests me, my works require that the viewer is willing to get close to the objects and look at them carefully. Only then can they convey meaning, only then do they become interesting.

The small format obviously entails certain limitations. But the format in itself does not limit the effect of the objects, their impact, their intensity. For it is not the size that determines the impact on the viewer, if the work will be moving or not. This is determined by the characteristics of the object itself, regardless of whether we are speaking of something as small as the palm of a hand or as large as a building. A whisper, soft as a breeze against the ear drum, can be the most intense of experiences.

Unidentified View is a series that differs from those described previously in that a three-dimensional element has been added to the plates – a detail from the decor is sculpted into the material. My intervention here is something that adds information, rather than

removes it. This series is also different from many of my previous works in another respect; since the motif is carved out free-hand, the idea is theoretically less limited by the plate's original print, by the object's inherent information. That the design of the relief pattern is not made up in this case but meticulously copied from an existing motif does not change the fact that it *could* have been made up. The idea incorporates a theoretical possibility that the motif separates itself from the dictates of the material.

The ceramic material of the creamware plates I use is normally four to eight millimetres thick. The thickness is the volume I have at my disposal when building up the relief details in *Unidentified View*. Although, "building up" is misleading – what I actually do is to remove material around the detail. I reveal the motif in the ceramic material.

This was not the first time I carved a three-dimensional element in a ceramic plate. One of my very last works, prior to embarking on my research fellowship, was in this technique. It incorporated two human figures carved into a large serving platter. The finished work consisted of two platters, the original blue-and-white platter alongside its processed white counterpart.

I had this piece in mind when I began working on *Unidentified View*. This time, it was not the human figures but the buildings that captured my attention. Some of the depicted buildings were obviously the result of repeated copying. The landscape prints have made a long journey before eventually being sealed under the glaze of the plate. The original subject may have been a real house, in an existing landscape, but from there the image has travelled via an original drawing, to the illustration in a template catalogue, and from the template to the copperplate with which the plates were decorated. Every time the copperplate got worn down, a further copying stage was added. Either the original plate was repaired by engraving it a little deeper, or the motif was transferred by hand to a new plate. Every stage in the production process involves manual copying; every transfer of the motif takes place via human interpretation. This process eventually wears down the originality of any image and amplifies the stereotypical. It is not surprising, therefore, that the realism of the landscape is eventually lost.

However, among these ossified, predictable motifs, I occasionally came across images of buildings that stood out from the rest. They looked authentic – as though they had been spared all the stages of the copying process and actually depicted real, existing edifices. These buildings triggered my imagination. These were houses that it was possible to enter and live in. *Unidentified View* incorporates a striving to make something unreal real, to step into the picture on the plate in one's imagination – like a child, unreservedly, ardently. As mentioned, I began with buildings, but I gradually moved on to other pictorial elements, such as boats or people. My successive choices depended on the element appearing to be *alive*, that the detail stood out from its context as something that could be animated, materialise.







From the series *Unidentified View*, 2009
Collection The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art (left piece)

In practice, I initiate the process by drawing the chosen detail directly from the original plate. I then transfer the drawing, using tracing paper, to a plate corresponding in shape and size to the original. Then, the area around the drawing must be sanded down so that the motif is higher than the background. Once that is done, I begin to slowly carve out every detail of the relief. I work a long time on miniscule surfaces, constantly comparing the detail with the original.

What astonishes and perplexes me in working on this series is how *suddenly* the detail is completed. Not ‘suddenly’ in the sense that it is quickly achieved, because it isn’t, but ‘suddenly’ as in *without warning*. The sanding and sculpting progresses through countless small actions, adjustments and changes, until, in the midst of everything, as if by magic, everything is in place. This is something I see. I see when the detail is *there*, when it has arrived. Then I must refrain from touching it. It is as though the slightest change could destroy everything; as suddenly as everything fell into place, it could all be disrupted.

My initial intention was to present these plates in pairs: each modified copy with its original counterpart. Following some input, I decided not to include the blue-and-white originals as part of the work. They simply felt superfluous. Originally, their role was to serve as a reminder of where the carved detail came from, as a visual internal reference. However, I don’t need to be that didactic. Viewers automatically worked out the link to printed landscape plates from the small carved detail. Nothing more was required.

This intrigues me. If I were to summarise what I have learned from working on *Unidentified View* it would be how little visual information is needed in order to suggest a distinct connection, a pictorial reference. In short, this teaches me something about how good we are at interpreting visual messages. As a consequence, I realise that the risk of a work becoming over-explicit in its expression is far greater than the risk of visual allusions being too subtle.





From the series *Going Blank Again*, 2010
Ceramic second-hand material,
sandblasted and sanded down using a rotary tool,
final sanding by hand
Collection National Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Norway

Going Blank Again – the act of emptying

Erasure is never merely a matter of making things disappear: there is always some detritus strewn about in the aftermath, some bruising to the surface from which word or image has been removed, some reminder of the violence done to make the world look new again.

BRIAN DILLON

The series *Going Blank Again* originated in an intention to “empty” a plate of its decor, removing all traces of the printed decor and thereby achieving a white-on-white effect. I envisioned a low-relief structure, where only the difference between shiny and matte suggested the former motif. I was seeking a visually complex structure that still contained vaguely identifiable details; something that enticed the beholder’s gaze to linger on the motif. But the edges of the blue print were not quite sharp, the cobalt had bled into the glaze surface. Therefore, when I was erasing, I had to relate to a fuzzy boundary between blue and white. A great deal of blue remained after my first attempt. The effect of this was completely different from the one I had expected. The image on the plate now most of all resembled a sketch made with a ball-point pen on white paper. It had the same shade of blue and the same thin, faltering lines as a hastily scribbled drawing. That was not the result I had intended – and it inspired me for that very reason. It was also pleasing that a repeatable, stereotypical print could attain such a fleeting, ephemeral quality.



From the series *Going Blank Again*, 2010
Ceramic second-hand material,
sandblasted and sanded down using a rotary tool, final sanding by hand
Collection The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art (right piece)

I knew then that this could be developed into a series. There was the potential of small variations in the processing: of leaving more or less of the blue – or removing it completely; making careful erasures so as to retain each detail – or only sparing a small number of details. In addition, of course, to the variations of the material itself: the differences in colour and quality of the landscapes, and the obvious differences in motif.

As I worked on *Going Blank Again* I became aware of how the process behind a visual result is crucial to the interpretation. As Dillon writes, a physical erasure inevitably reveals so much more than merely an absence. An object that is physically “emptied” of information will never go *blank* again. Its previous history remains in the object, regardless of how invisible the traces are. In that way, mechanical erasure removes nothing – in fact, the process merely adds a new layer to the object’s expressive contents.

I wrote above that sheer curiosity drove me to work serially. It is true that my method is built largely on an object-by-object progression: What happens if I subject this object to that treatment? Nevertheless, as a series evolves, I strive constantly to achieve sufficient variation from one object to the next, complementing the totality with objects that contribute new information and fill out the series. I decided to limit this series to blue-and-white plates only. This was mainly an aesthetic choice; the ball-point pen effect appealed to me, and I was seeking to create a series that appeared simplified, fragile, ethereal. I also reckoned that the totality would be sufficiently varied, even without further colours.





Caroline Sotter - Gang Book Again

The object-by-object approach is typical of my work process. Work in the studio is characterised by an intense focus on each individual object. I take one object at a time and rarely allow the production process to be determined by any overall future plan. I need this openness to see and use the properties inherent in the material from the start – to maintain a sensitivity to the original features of the object. It is the individual object's history I want to make visible. This tendency, as it could be called, also impacts on how I have approached the issue of presentation.

Creating a focus – some thoughts on presentation

The artistic end result of my project was presented on 16 October 2010, with the opening of my solo exhibition *Going Blank Again* and the release of the publication *Closer/Närmare*. My final exhibition featured two of my latest series. I showed the objects mounted on a plain, monochrome wall. At the beginning of my research fellowship period, I had different thoughts on presentation. When planning the project, I had envisioned that the exhibition context could be an interesting field to explore and outlined an interest in presentation formats where the background was not neutral but contributed in some way to the contents of the work. I imagined an exploration of more or less complex installations where the objects formed a totality together with the setting.

Meanwhile, I was determined to work on the basis of individual objects, or limited groups of objects, and their stories – letting the objects retain something of their integrity all the way from raw material to finished work. After all, that is how I work naturally – I allow the material to have a privileged position from beginning to end. In that way, the finished works are highly self-contained units. They need nothing external, they hold their entire contents. And they are, I believe, typical examples of the kind of autonomous, sophisticated objects that are best viewed separately, screened from their surroundings.

To combine this with a more embracing, significant presentation format proved difficult, not to say impossible. It felt wrong to think that the objects had anything to gain by being placed in a contextually complex setting. On the contrary, an exhibition format of that kind could diminish the individual objects, stealing their intensity. It would cause a struggle for attention that would benefit neither element.

In hindsight, I realise that my original idea was not logically tenable. My initial project outline gives the impression that I was planning to have both the objects *and* the space around them as my starting point. But to place finished objects in a spatial context will never be anything but a placing. For the work on spatial installations to be serious, the space in its entirety must be the raw material on which my work is based. This, in turn, reduces the objects or elements in the room to stage props, subordinated to the totality.

This concept is interesting. But it was a step I was not ready to take during my research fellowship. I still had too much left that I wanted to do with the objects themselves.

But let's assume that the chance for a fresh start arose. Then, this prospect of treating the space as raw material is an attractive alternative, in theory. Instead of involving the environment towards the end of the work process, as a part of the presentation, the strategy would be to process the space in the same way I process objects – directly and physically, based on its physical structure and the meanings and significances it carries. This is how it must be done, I believe – if the concept of totality is to be dealt with in earnest.

Thus, finally, I chose to avoid a too contrived, complex or theatrical presentation of my works. It is the objects themselves that are interesting, and when they are displayed it may be that simplicity is, after all, the best option. Even if you choose to keep the presentation simple, there are many issues to consider. I have aimed for a pronounced focus on the objects. I have toned down external influences, both in terms of visual effects and the inclusion of meaning-laden elements. I have been especially wary with regard to the mood added by the setting. My objects balance naturally between sentimentality and sobriety. The original material is imbued with nostalgia, while my actions, my modifications, are mechanical, detached, in the way they are carried out. The processing denudes the objects, elevates them to a level where we can look at them with fresh eyes. But this balance is easily upset. For instance, it is immediately upset if a nostalgic element is added to the presentation.

The artistic end result

The artistic end result of my project consisted of two parts: a collection of works presented in a solo exhibition, and a book with illustrations and texts from different project phases.

In the final exhibition, *Going Blank Again* at Gallery s.e (16 Oct-21 Nov, 2010) I showed two of my most recent series: *Unidentified View*, and *Going Blank Again*, which gave the exhibition its name. Gallery s.e is a privately-owned gallery specialising in painting and photography. The gallery has no tradition of showing material-based art, and it was by no means sure that a ceramics exhibition would fit in. The gallery space I chose was a plain, oblong room with a grey concrete floor and a high ceiling. It was important to me that the exhibition space contrasted with the objects by having a “rough” character. Not all galleries in Bergen can live up to this, since several of them are situated in old wooden buildings, with all the charms of a painted wooden interior. It was strongly advocated by the Research Fellowship Programme that the exhibition be held in Bergen.

The exhibition included twelve works from the series *Going Blank Again* and eight works from the *Unidentified View* series. *Going Blank Again* was produced from start to finish in 2010, while *Unidentified View* was created in 2009-2010.

Going Blank Again consists of a series of landscape-decorated plates where the original print has been removed, leaving only traces that hint of the former blue motif. The plates in the series *Unidentified View*, on the other hand, have been sanded so that only a small detail from the landscape – a house, a boat, a human figure – remains in low relief. These two series differ from each other in design and expression. In *Going Blank Again* I almost surgically remove the narrative information of the plates. My processing “empties” the landscape plates of their old contents, “cleans” them and thus makes it possible for us to regard them with fresh eyes. Expressively, the plates in this series move from sentimentality to sobriety. In the *Unidentified View* series the process is almost the reverse. I sculpt a low relief into the plate free-hand. While *Going Blank Again* operates mainly on a two-dimensional level, *Unidentified View* utilises the depth of the ceramic material as a three-dimensional volume. Here, my manipulation actually adds information. These works give scope to imagination, not by the absence of pictorial data but, on the contrary, through being stimulated by it. These two series complement each other, they show the potential of the material, while demonstrating the width of the technique I have explored.

While some of the works produced in the course of the project maintain an experimental character, as stages in a learning process, I regard the above two series as finished works. *Going Blank Again* and *Unidentified View* turned out as intended both aesthetically and conceptually; they are simply the research fellowship works for which I feel the least reservations. I also chose them for my final exhibition because they, unlike some of my other series from this period, stand out from my previous work. They are not merely repetitions of familiar strategies but represent something new in my development, an extension of my artistic repertoire.

My objects are detailed and delicate. Showing them is largely a case of persuading the beholder to look carefully. For my final exhibition I kept the presentation as terse as possible. The objects can take this attention, and I did not want anything in the surroundings to compete with them. I tried different background colours for the exhibition. To show the objects to their best advantage I looked for a shade that enhanced the works without competing for attention, either in colour, strength or lustre. I also considered whether the colours would add a mood to the room. My final choice was a matte, medium-grey wall paint with a hint of blue. I realise that total neutrality is impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, some visual devices have a stronger effect than others, and colour especially does influence the mood of a room.

My works are best seen at normal eye level. When hanging them, the most crucial issue is thus how to achieve the most interesting overall presentation with the small variations that the visual elements allow. I wanted to avoid a too monotonous row of plates. In my mind, I envisioned something like the lively yet purposeful rhythmical drips left by a leaking paint tin if you walk with it across the floor. When positioning the objects, I aimed for a non-mechanical repetition, a kind of spontaneous progression with a clear direction.

In conjunction with the opening of the exhibition, I published *Closer/Närmare*, which presents a broader selection of results from my research fellowship period, both finished works and works in the experimental stage. I have described *Closer/Närmare* as an extended exhibition catalogue, intended for a broader audience. In addition to the visual documentation, I describe the work process and themes of my project, with the intention of giving an intimate insight into the mental sphere in which the artistic result was developed. The text in this publication can be seen as a close reading of the creative process. I also highlight the theme that was at the centre of my artistic project from a subjective and poetic perspective: the relationship between memories and objects in the human mind. This personal angle is expressed partly as descriptions of my own memories of objects.

The central role of language in my study is explained in the chapter PROGRESSIVE WRITING. Whereas this paper was written mostly afterwards, the exhibition publication *Closer/Närmare* contains texts written in the course of the project, as part of the textual exploration that engrossed me. In *Closer/Närmare* I strove for a language characterised by closeness and adaptability. Through language I wanted to get close to what I was describing, the artistic process. I believe that a more detached, objective, “academic” tone would not have enabled this – and in that sense the publication is an example of how the format or genre of a text influences its contents, and, by extension, how the voice of a text can either facilitate or block communication.



An absorption, even a passionate absorption, in a material does not, a priori, stop you thinking.

EDMUND DE WAAL

The field of contemporary visual culture I refer to, and which I see myself as being part of, I have chosen to term material-based art. With this I refer to a practice that takes place on the boundary between a material-based and concept-based approach, a practice that originates in the material, both as matter and idea. This area bridges the divide between more traditional, crafts-based practices and conceptually influenced contemporary art. What I am describing is naturally a phenomenon without distinct demarcation lines. It can encompass anything from works that merely suggest a conscious choice of material, to works that focus exclusively on the material and where the material is consequently the primary content of the work.

Thus, material has a key role in what I define as my point of departure in contemporary art. It is not, however, merely the physical and aesthetic qualities that interest me, but also the associations and references inherent in the material. Thus, the material imbues the work with historical, cultural and economic implications.

Giving consideration to the material's conceptual integrity in this way entails a number of limitations. But it also opens up for an internal dialogue with the material. To me, this is what choosing a material-based starting point means, to allow the work to take the form of a discussion. This is a working method I find intellectually challenging. I set myself a task, and the task is to follow the direction that the material indicates, to allow myself to be led.

I am aware that my interpretation of the term 'material-based' is slightly controversial. Nevertheless, this is the term I feel most at home with. My definition of this field differs in that material to me comprises so much more than merely physical properties. In addition to my own practice, I also see a need to make room for material-based practices I have seen in contemporary art - material-based practices with a distinct conceptual dimension. Many readers will realise that this approach is contrary to certain old biases, for instance the one propounding that conceptual and object- or material-based art are two mutually exclusive categories, and that a work can only be either conceptually or materially based, never both.

On materials

The ceramic production process in which clay is shaped and fired strikes me as a typical example of creating in the sense of "making out of nothing". Until recently, the ceramic field had no tradition of incorporating fired material. This is probably due to purely

practical considerations; it is no secret that unfired clay is easier to shape than fired clay. Thus, you really have to want to do it. Even so, there is evidence that a change is taking place. Factory-produced elements have become increasingly common as components in ceramic works of art. It lies close at hand to assume that this is connected with the material prosperity of the West. There is no shortage of things. In consequence, the craftsmen whose task was formerly to produce objects no longer have a social obligation to produce them. On the contrary, it could even be claimed that the abundance, by its sheer existence, prompts us to recycle existing objects as material.

But is the ecological aspect really that relevant to the individual artist? Admittedly, the tangible excess of objects has undoubtedly had an effect and could probably cause both an emotional and an intellectual aversion to producing new objects. But the decisive reasons for recycling material are probably more complex than that. Perhaps, this impulse stems just as much from a curiosity and genuine interest in the world of objects and their stories.

Personally, I find it meaningful to see this development as a change in the attitude to materials. That which is regarded as potential raw material for art today is different from what it was until quite recently – and the change has something to do with quantity. Raw material is almost by definition a substance that exists in abundance, and today that includes factory-made ceramic goods, almost to the same extent as unprocessed clay.

So, what is a material? And inversely: is there anything that definitely cannot be regarded as raw material? If we define raw material as a substance that, in one way or another, can be transformed into a work of art, we arrive at a concept of material that actually embraces most of the material, and in a way also the immaterial, world around us. What was acknowledged not long ago as a new, controversial strategy in art, i.e. creating a work of art out of used, existing materials, can now be regarded as the norm. Nowadays, everything is potentially raw material.

Considering that processing of objects is at the very centre of the kind of material-based art I am interested in, a traditional term such as 'readymade' is problematic. The word 'readymade' is associated with certain specific expectations on the meaning of the context, on a challenge against the establishment and a questioning of what art is. These issues may have grown obsolete. Issues that seem more relevant today than the fact that the object is pre-produced and not created from scratch by the artist, are, for instance, that the object has a history and a background in a reality of objects.

The use of existing objects hardly becomes less interesting as a strategy just because it is no longer controversial. The very fact that we can see beyond the provocative element, the shock effect, opens up for potentially qualitative, intelligent and penetrating explorations.



Håkan Lindgren, *Pair of dog figurines, early 1900s*, 2009
Earthenware, reworked readymade
Photo: Noak Lönn

A look at contemporary ceramics

The use of found material in contemporary ceramic art falls roughly into two categories. Either it involves one single object (or a small number of objects) that is physically modified and, via the artist's modifications, "elevated to art". Or, at the other end of the spectrum, it involves incorporating found objects in large quantities: collections of various kinds, installations, assemblages, etc. Here it is usually the composition and the context, rather than any individual processing of objects, that gives the work its meaning. My gaze in this context follows my fascination for the history of the individual objects. In installations comprising masses of objects side by side, the focus is often of another kind, the stories take place on another plane. This is one of the reasons why I will not discuss that category of work to any greater degree in this paper.

In contemporary ceramic art it appears that the change I describe above is manifested as a form of disintegration of the traditional, step-by-step progression of the production process. We see how the typical succession from clay to finished object via forming, glazing and firing is no longer universally prevalent in the production of ceramic art. The fact that readymade objects are used in art production is merely one facet of this development. It can also, it seems, involve a new perspective on the production process as such. The dividing line between work and raw material is increasingly fuzzy. Today, the production process can be interrupted at any stage. The final work can just as well consist of fired as of unfired clay, or a combination of both. We also see examples of works where the production process appears to have been reversed, with the artist pulverising a glazed and fired ceramic object.

An example of the latter practice is the work *Pair of Dog Figurines, early 1900s* by Håkan Lindgren (Sweden). The kind of experiment in terms of production methods I refer to is found in works by, for instance, Clare Twomey (UK), Linda Sormin (Canada/USA),

Marek Cecula (Poland/USA), Neil Brownsword (UK), Keith Harrison (UK) and Phoebe Cummings (UK). Closest to my own approach are experimental practices incorporating direct processing of fired ceramic material. Ceramic artists/designers who operate in this field are, for instance, Barnaby Barford (UK), Gesine Hackenberg (Germany/Netherlands), Cj O'Neill (Ireland/UK), Jo Meesters (Netherlands) and Kjell Rylander (Sweden). Out of these, only Rylander will be discussed in more detail in this paper.

The artists I discuss as examples in the following sections are my personal favourites. There are a few similarities between their work and mine, for instance, in the significance of the material, the time-consuming production processes and the allusions to day-to-day life through the inclusion of prosaic objects. The main reason why these artists are mentioned here, however, is that they inspire me – and thus constitute vital reference points to my work.



Ane Mette Hol, *Untitled (After Sherrie Levine's Art History)*, 2007
 Drawing. Pencil, colored pencil and pen on paper.
 Size 29,7 x 42 cm
 Collection Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Norway
 Courtesy LAUTOM contemporary and the artist



Susan Collis, *The oyster's our world*, 2004
 Wooden stepladder, mother of pearl, shell, coral,
 fresh water pearl, cultured pearls, white opal.
 Private collection, UK
 Courtesy SEVENTEEN and the artist

Hol & Collis: Subtle transformations

[They know that] craft is mainly a matter of persuasiveness, a technique for grabbing attention and holding it. Like any form of rhetoric, it can serve equally to open up thought, or close it down.

GLENN ADAMSON

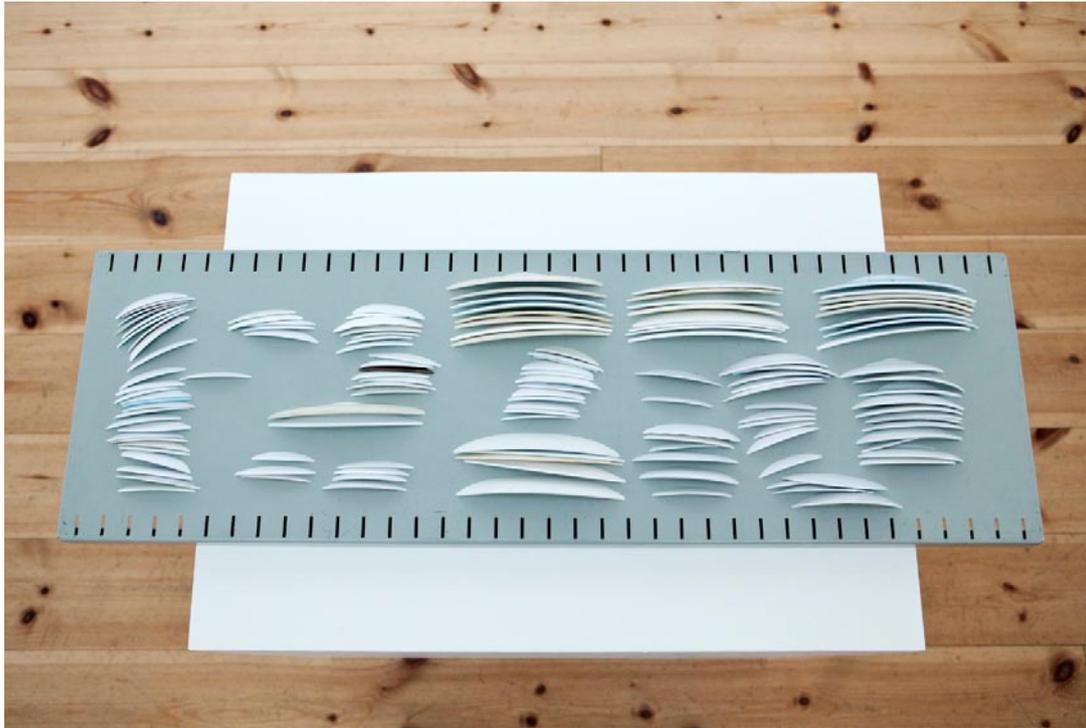
This fascinates me. Ane Mette Hol's black-and-white Xerox copies, meticulously drawn in pencil and coloured markers on white paper. The typical traces of the photocopier, random ink lines and blobs, conscientiously reproduced. Susan Collis' wooden stepladder with paint splashes, where the drops on closer inspection turn out to be inset mother of pearl and precious stones. The same meticulous execution here, almost a tenderness, in how the blotches and flaws are observed and rendered.

These are objects that are transformed, almost imperceptibly, almost invisibly, yet totally. They are copies that attain their meaning in that they are copies, precisely because of their relationship to an original, because there is an original. I am fascinated by the painstaking manual repetition, which entails that when we look at the work, the duplicate,

we see practically exactly the same thing as when we regard the original. However, what we don't see – but are merely informed of – makes all the difference.

The works themselves are low-key. They are subtle. And they are subtle exactly because they are so painstakingly executed. They are actually so well-made that the execution takes a backseat – it is their technical brilliance that makes these objects work on the conceptual level. Since they are produced with what appears to be infinite precision, the works invite intellectual contemplation. There is nothing expressive in the visual dimension that could force us to consider the artist's person, thoughts or emotional life. A conceptual and designerly integrity emanates from these objects. As viewers, we are left alone with them. Our reading is a matter between us and the object, free from the presence of the artist.

Thus, our gaze oscillates between the visible object and the absent original. And it is as though the meaning of the work resides in that movement – the oscillation of the gaze followed by thought, between what we see and what we know. The work is not a goal in itself. The goal is to move the mind.



Kjell Rylander, *Portrait of the Anonymous*, 2010
Trimmed edges of porcelain dishes and plates on a gray painted metal shelf on top of a pedestal made of mdf-board and placed on the floor.
The porcelain parts are loose.
Collection The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art

Rylander: Something happens to me when I do like this

At first glance, there is nothing particularly sophisticated about Kjell Rylander's works. His material is generic industrial porcelain of various kinds, and Kjell does not make any effort to excel in craftsmanship when modifying it. He does what needs to be done, nothing more.

And yet, these objects won't leave me alone, they stand there, as if mumbling, and they are lodged in my mind long after I have left. Sometimes, I don't understand Kjell's work. But when it comes to capturing the viewer's attention, he takes it to a new level. That is where his sophistication appears. These works are no one-liners. They are the opposite –intricate poems of material, small, multifaceted stories that slowly unfold.

Can that really be true, you may ask, for in addition to their unassuming aspect, there is also something seemingly random about his works. As though Kjell did not quite know what he was doing. As though he hadn't thought it through. And this, I believe, is where the secret lies. For although Kjell certainly knew what he was doing, this knowledge has nothing in common with the commonsensical thinking of the left cerebral hemisphere. Straightforward black-and-white logic has no foothold in his work. Instead, intuition is always close at hand, the sudden whim that cannot be explained and yet gives such

absolute meaning. There is a ready acceptance here of the inexplicable – of certain choices that are so vague, so fragile, that they could not be arrived at through cogitation but only through empathising.⁹ These subtle decisions become fully seen, tenderly cared for. Kjell takes no shortcuts, nor does he underestimate the spectator's capacity to follow him into these complex spaces.

In his works, I am faced with a strange yet natural form of logic. Relationships I cannot put words to are visualised, and I find myself in a remarkable, receptive exercise that alternates between associative intellectual contemplation and intuitively sensual empathising.

The subversive power of art

What man is, life can only intimate. That is all it can do.

PÄR LAGERKVIST

A crucial function of art is that it can move us. Communication at its best entails exactly this; something in our surroundings touches us, reverberates within us.

Creating art involves a strong belief in the potential of mankind. It is about allowing the ineffable to exist in oneself and in the world – resisting all mindsets that belittle this potential. The works of Hol, Collis and Rylander appear to me as examples of the intelligent, sensitive, subversive power of art. Their works console me.

Moreover, Hol, Collis and Rylander serve as examples of the material-based genre I have outlined. In their work, the material, in all its aspects, is indelibly linked to the contents of the work. These are conceptual works that are based in our concrete, material reality. They infiltrate our everyday lives. Paint-splattered surfaces, cheap black-and-white photocopies and industrial mugs will never be the same again – regardless of where we come across them. In this way, the works live on in the spectator. They challenge the habitual reactions of our minds, creating new associative paths and extending our mental repertoire. In all their serenity, these works represent the subversive potential of art. The works of Hol, Collis and Rylander have no power-related, gender-critical, political or otherwise socially oriented agenda. They are more internal in their intentions, and this consequently makes them more vulnerable. This is art about thinking differently, seeing differently; it is about our perception of reality, and about the perceptual and cognitive challenge as a starting point.

⁹ In that way, moving one object in relation to another can sometimes only be justified with the words, "Something happens to me when I do like this" (K. R. December 2009).

In this chapter, I have in no way intended to provide a complete or objective list of artistic references. Nor would an independent observer necessarily group my practice with these particular artists. After all, their works do not *resemble* mine. Out of Hol, Collis and Rylander, only the last-named uses ceramic second-hand material like me. Nevertheless, these are the artists I have chosen to highlight as my key reference areas.

In my view, it is not essential whether there is a visual or technical similarity between your reference area and your own work. Infinitely more important than any outward semblance is that there exists a correlation in the *approach* to the work. In Hol, Collis and Rylander I recognise their attitude to their works, the process behind the works – and this weighs considerably more than any potential visual likeness in the end result. Moreover, I claim that references should be chosen where there is a genuine interest. They should be sources of inspiration – something to aspire to. In this regard, it is possible that the present chapter may give a better idea of what I am aiming for – rather than where I am right now.



LOOKING BACK

A scientist will always strive for a result which can be shared by other scientists, in one way or another – his or her work has a rational basis. But the artist's activity is attached to the irrational – and its results can, it seems to me, never really be shared on an equal basis. In art, the rules will always be defined afterwards. In art, a dangerous and wonderful freedom prevails, and the only way forward is to aim for such power of expression or persuasion (of whatever kind) that in the intoxication of the moment, the intoxication of the work will be so inspiring, so well done, that resistance will be overcome – and the work will be accepted!

JAN SVENUNGSSON

I visualise my research fellowship project as a room in which I have dwelled. The contours of the room were there from the start, drawn up by myself. In the dark, I discerned objects, areas of interest, and tried to formulate something about them at the start of the project.

In my original project outline, I thus condensed the goal of my work into two sentences. Firstly, I aimed to “focus on the relationship between people, memories and objects, highlighting the use of second-hand objects in contemporary material-based art”. Secondly, I would strive in my own creative practice towards “greater clarity with regard to my artistic subjects and themes”.

These intentions are not far from how the project actually developed. The aspects in which the original plan differs from the outcome concern the nature and format of the work, not its contents.

In the course of the project, I have observed the use of recycled material in the field of contemporary art where I position my own activities. The purpose of this has been primarily to clarify my own position. It has never been my goal to conclusively describe or “chart” this phenomenon. Thus, I mean that if this project highlights the use of found material in contemporary material-based art in general, it is just as much through my own artistic practice as through the written reflections that came about thanks to my participation in the research fellowship programme. The knowledge developed in the course of the project was generated either within, or as a direct extension of, my artistic exploration.

The written part of my project has largely come to concern verbalising some of that which takes place tacitly when a work is created. In that way, I have devoted more time to studying objects and phenomena that are closely related to my own visual, concrete work, than to objective analyses of external phenomena and fields. In this respect I can see that to some extent my original questions did not quite hit the mark. For instance, the questions I ask relating to the memory theme are more suited to an academic paper – not to artistic research and development. A more fruitful result could perhaps have

been achieved if my questions had been sorted at an earlier stage with regard to their actual relevance – in an artistic context.

However, I did not restrict myself to my original questions but delved deeply into any subject that engaged me in the artistic process, from concrete, practical problems to more profound issues relating to art and existence. The room metaphor has helped me to organise this process mentally – a room can hold both large and small, concrete and abstract, banal and sublime things side by side. The room as a model for thought opens up for an exploration where I could study object by object, field by field, in a non-linear progression. The project has involved exploring the questions in this room at their own level, with the verbal approximation they each required. My research has built on a belief that these questions all dwell amicably in this room for a reason; that everything is interconnected and that the links will become clearer if I only give them time.

When it comes to applying theory in my written work, my strategy has been to prioritise the type of literature that was most nourishing to my artistic work. To the extent that I have related to reference material, be it written or visual, this has been primarily for my own inspiration and artistic development, and secondarily to aid an awareness of my own position in the field and substantiate my own statements in a current discourse.

In hindsight, I doubt whether the purpose of artistic research should at all be to provide answers to questions, putting an end to further discussion. Perhaps the strength of this form of research lies in its capacity to contribute nuances and depth and to make discussions visible. In that way, new aspects of a field are uncovered, new perspectives revealed.

Towards greater clarity

Artistic practices differ in many ways from academia and science. As an artist, my work is always of a more subjective and private nature. I have chosen to make room for this in the written part of my project. I have wanted to write about what happens in the artistic process, how I relate to my material, and the modifications I add to it. In order to truly get close to the knowledge that lies in the intuitive artistic processes, I have occasionally used a highly subjective, guileless and intimate voice.

I have stated as one of my research goals to aim at greater clarity in my artistic subjects and my themes. I would not claim that this development has not taken place; what I do see, however, is that this striving is present in all artistic activities. All creativity moves in this direction: from blind fumbling, towards clarity. In that sense, it is not only within an institutional framework that development towards clarity can take place. The creative process is, by nature, a striving towards lucidity, towards a deeper understanding of the subjects we find interesting at the time, and the themes that engross us. These subjects and themes vary, of course, and therefore I doubt that this process can ever be concluded once and for all.

The development towards clarity that was initiated by the research fellowship programme has had a greater impact in another sense. My time as a research fellow has strongly influenced how I perceive my position in contemporary art. For the past three years, I have actively monitored the national and international discussion on the expanded field of arts and crafts. I have participated in seminars and read recent literature. Through my own presentations in various forums I have developed a faith in my own voice and practised making it heard. In that way, my research fellowship period has given me an overview and more confidence in my own contribution to the discussion. I know who the audience is and I know what position I am speaking from.

In my paper, I have taken the liberty of embracing and describing the field of activity that immediately gives meaning, seen from my specific starting point. From my perspective, I have embarked on describing a self-defined field, and a relatively narrow one at that, within contemporary culture. This is by no means an attempt to redefine the categories we normally regard as art, crafts and design. On the contrary, I have done what I can to avoid being influenced by that discussion. I do not consider it my task to delineate categories or draw up firm boundaries; I am too deeply implicated in the case for that. In all honesty, these boundaries do not interest me sufficiently to muster up the detachment required for such an undertaking.

The bittersweet farewell

One distinct challenge in my project, and perhaps in general in this form of institutional research, has been to remain unaffected by the requirement to “succeed”, and instead be daring, risk-taking and experimental. I predicted this difficulty at an early stage and asked myself whether I would be capable of sufficiently big strides in my artistic practice. I honestly cannot say whether I have succeeded.

At the start of the project, my intention was to explore the artistic potential of ceramic second-hand material. My wordings concerning the concrete end result were vague. That is only natural, perhaps even necessary, since this was the area where development was expected to take place. Had I been able to predict the end result, research would have been superfluous. The whole point of the project appeared to be that I did *not* know anything about the outcome. In hindsight, I realise that even if I was vague about the end result, there was nevertheless a fundamental idea in the background. There was a tacit understanding at the beginning that the project could – or even should – launch a new artistic orientation. My objective was that my research would lead me to unknown territory. New doors into art would appear, doors leading onwards, to rooms I did not know existed.

No honest, systematic research ever marches entirely on the spot, and I would not claim that this one has. But the concrete steps I have taken have hardly been any giant strides. The works I have produced over the past year are actually quite similar to the works I was producing at the beginning of the project. For instance, they are all plates. In that respect, I do not consider myself to have moved forward into new artistic territory, and although this was not an explicit goal it was definitely a strong, subconscious wish.

This is not for lack of searching, because I have searched. I have stuck to my plan: steadfastly pursuing the exploration, scrutinising found ceramic material from every conceivable perspective – waiting for a new angle, a theme, a road, to appear. This did not happen. Despite my endeavours, the material did not open itself up as I had expected. Small variations, yes, but no definite new direction. It is not easy to discern whether this is due to flaws in my research, or to the properties of the material itself. Perhaps, my faith in the potential of second-hand ceramic material was exaggerated – perhaps this is rather a limited field? Or were the limitations in me – in the predictability of my choices, my being overly one-sided in my preferences? Maybe the fault lies neither in the material nor in me, but elsewhere – in the process. In creative work, it is vital that we are truly *in* the process, that we are mentally present where the process is taking place. Skipping a stage or rushing a step could therefore lead to problems. Maybe my desire for a more radical outcome was utopian? Perhaps great developmental leaps are not that easy to provoke.

Nevertheless, I completed the project with a sense of being full up, finished, rather than with a feeling of standing before hitherto unfathomed possibilities. The project has truly involved an artistic in-depth study. I have done practically everything I ever wanted to do to a plate. I am ready to retreat and close the door to that room, at least for a while. The fact that I cannot seem to dispel a sense of disappointment, is probably because the feeling of being full up is never that exciting – it is always more scintillating to face a new beginning than an end.

Luckily, my research had another surprise in store – the discovery of subjective writing as a road to understanding and a means of expression in its own right. I thought I was prepared for surprise, but this was a door I had not foreseen. My exploration of writing as a learning process and a way of getting close to my own practice has been important to me on a personal level. Language as a parallel means of expression and a complement to my visual practice is definitely something I will take with me into my future work.

New ground

With regard to my personal hopes for artistic regeneration, the project was perhaps not entirely successful. In relation to the field of contemporary ceramic art, however, it could still be argued that the project has fulfilled its purpose. In artistic research of this kind, based on a specific material and a specific tradition, one of the primary research goals could be to make new ground in the area visible. In my research, I have expressed myself about a practice that is on the periphery of the established field of ceramic art – the potential of prefabricated ceramics as a raw material in the production of art. By being verbalised, the field we can see, and thus include in discussions, is extended. Both in my own artistic practice and in writing about it, I have striven towards a nuancing and expansion of the expressive potential of ceramic material. I would not claim that my research reveals any entirely new or hitherto unimagined strategies or techniques. Nor can the results of my research be seen as particularly easy to apply. However, what a project such as mine can hardly avoid doing is breaking new ground for the ceramic

medium as a means of expression. What, and how, can we communicate today using a material such as ceramics? With my project *Second Hand Stories* I have wanted to be one voice in this discussion.

Concerning the written part of the project, it is *how*, rather than *what*, I have written that has perhaps contributed most to development in the field. I have looked for verbal alternatives to the detached, academic voice when writing about my work. In particular, I have explored subjective writing as a means of accessing the knowledge development that takes place in practice when a work of art is created. “The artist as writer” is a theme that has fascinated me, and thus the discussion of the role of text in artistic research, and in artistic practices in general, has taken a prominent position in my project.

LITERATURE

In addition to the epigraphs, the uncommented excerpts at the beginning of some of the chapters, this paper contains few references to written sources. That does not mean that my work is uninfluenced by the writings, ideas and theories of others. On the contrary, my own voice, a voice that is presented in this text, has grown stronger through my dialogue with such external sources – by what I have heard, read, adopted or rejected.

The literature I have studied during my research fellowship can roughly be divided into three categories: firstly, material relating to the discursive field of my project – the field in which I am operating; secondly, texts that discuss the theme of my project – memories and objects relating to memories; and last but not least, texts that discuss the institutional context of my project – artistic research, and especially the role of text in artistic research and development. Below, my reference literature is listed in accordance with these three categories.

The largest of these three categories consists of texts focusing from various angles on the specific field in contemporary visual art that interests me and to which I ascribe my own work – a practice that, depending on the perspective from which it is regarded, falls into the sub-groups of material-based contemporary art/crafts/contemporary ceramics/ etc. The discussion I have been able to observe through these texts has been invaluable to my professional development and my understanding of the field.

Adamson, Glenn. *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford/New York: Berg Publishers, 2007.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction - Culture as screenplay: How art reprograms the world*. English translation Jeanine Herman. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2007 [2002].

Bourriaud, Nicolas and Karen Moss. Interviewed by Stretcher, 2002
http://www.stretcher.org/archives/i1_a/2003_02_25_i1_archive.php (29.1.2008).

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Bull, Knut Astrup. *En ny diskurs for kunsthåndverket: En bok om det nye konseptuelle kunsthåndverket*. Oslo: Unipax, 2007.

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Hanaor, Cigalle (ed.). *Breaking the Mould: New Approaches to Ceramics*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007.

Harrod, Tanya and Edmund de Waal. *Gift*. Gmunden: Think Tank, a European Initiative for the Applied Arts, Edition 04, 2007.

Harrod, Tanya. "Contemporary Concerns: What is the place of craft in a full world?". *Resurgence*, Issue 209, 2001. <http://www.resurgence.org/resurgence/issues/harrod209.htm> (5.12.2006)

Lignel, Benjamin and Jorunn Veiteberg (eds.). *Speed*. Gmunden: Think Tank, a European Initiative for the Applied Arts, Edition 06, 2009.

Sbrissa, Claudia. "Exhibition Review: Poetics of the Handmade in Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles." *The Journal of Modern Craft*, Volume I, Issue 2, 2008: 303-306.

Smith, Terry. *What is Contemporary Art?*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Twomey, Clare (ed.). *Possibilities & Losses: transitions in clay*. Middlesbrough: Crafts Council/mima, 2009.

Veiteberg, Jorunn. "Kunsten å låna. Om ei platte av Irene Nordli." *Kunst og kultur*, No. 1, 2009: 2-13.

Veiteberg, Jorunn. *Craft in Transition*. English translation Douglas Ferguson. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2005.

Veiteberg, Jorunn. "Loaded Manipulations". English translation Douglas Ferguson. *Object Factory: The Art of Industrial Ceramics*. Toronto: The Gardiner Museum, 2008: 48-51.

In connection with the thematic exploration in my project – objects from the private sphere as memory objects and the role of memories in the experience of continuity and coherence – the following titles have provided valuable insights and inspiration.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. English translation Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958].

Brodsky, Joseph. *Less Than One*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishers, 1986.

Brodsky, Joseph. *On Grief and Reason*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishers, 1996.

Carr, David. *Time, Narrative, and History*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Hallam, Elizabeth and Jenny Hockney. *Death, Memory & Material Culture*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001.

Lagerkvist, Pär. *Aftonland*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1953.

Lagerkvist, Pär. *Det Besegrade Livet*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1927.

Lupton, Deborah. *The Emotional Self: A Sociocultural Exploration*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

Wilson, Janelle L. *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005.

The artist as writer, and the role of text in artistic research and development, are themes that have been particularly emphasised in my study. My interpretation of this field has been profoundly influenced by the following three publications.

Borgdorff, Henk. "The Debate on Research in the Arts". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 02. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006.

Nyrnes, Aslaug. "Lighting from the Side: Rhetoric and Artistic Research". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 03. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006.

Svenungsson, Jan. *An Artist's Text Book*. Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, 2007.

The epigraphs in this paper are from:

Page 5) Aslaug Nyrnes. "Lighting from the Side: Rhetoric and Artistic Research". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 03. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006, p. 12.

Page 10) Aslaug Nyrnes. "Lighting from the Side: Rhetoric and Artistic Research". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 03. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006, p. 20.

Page 15) Henk Borgdorff. "The Debate on Research in the Arts". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 02. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006, p. 13.

Page 19) Joseph Brodsky. *Less Than One*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishers, 1986, p. 62.

Page 19) David Carr. *Time, Narrative, and History*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 97.

Page 20) Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. English translation Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958], p. 14-15.

Page 21) Joseph Brodsky. *Less Than One*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishers, 1986, p. 459.

Page 26) Aslaug Nyrnes. "Lighting from the Side: Rhetoric and Artistic Research". *Sensuous Knowledge: Focus on Artistic Research and Development*, Edition 03. Bergen: Bergen National Academy of the Arts, 2006, p. 9.

Page 56) Brian Dillon. "The Revelation of Erasure". *Tate Etc.*, Issue 8/Autumn 2006. <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue8/erasurerevelation.htm> (19.12.2008).

Page 65) Edmund de Waal. Statement in *The Foundation*. Gabi Dewald (ed.). Gmunden: Think Tank, a European Initiative for the Applied Arts, Edition 01, 2004, p. 19.

Page 69) Glenn Adamson. "The Spectacle of the Everyday". *Out of the Ordinary: Spectacular Craft*. Laurie Britton Newell (ed.). London: V&A Publications and the Crafts Council, 2007, p. 26.

Page 72) Pär Lagerkvist. *Det Besegrade Livet*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1927, p. 30. (Quote translated into English by Gabriella Berggren.)

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