

Investigations into Enlightenment.

An Artistic Paper by Laura Johanna König
Konstfack Craft! Ceramic&Glass // Master 2 // Spring 2021



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I spent the previous months
in a laboratory.
Literally and metaphorically.

In the frame of alchemical investigations, I tried to experience the fascination for the transformation of cheap matter into noble material, collected ideas about contemporary gold, wanted to understand the allure of the super human image and experimented with the creation of Philosopher's Stones. I am a storyteller and slipped into the role of a 21st-century-chemist.

My investigation is both rooted in and materialized through porcelain—a material from natural and supernatural qualities and the material I am strongly addicted to. Porcelain offers the creation of containers for liquids as well as those for stories and I am exploring ways to materialize thoughts I perceive as worth communicating.

Written words are from the same value as materialized symbols and gestures. My practical works are independent experiments and illustrations, but strongly build upon the essay in front of you. I am documenting my research into ancient alchemy and use its pictoriality and philosophy to draw lines into artistic practices and contemporary society.

Alchemy is a story worth telling
because it is timeless and it is everywhere.
It is a story about gold.

Alchemical Investigation

Experimentation

Transformation (of matter)

Materialization (of stories)

Gestures (of care)

Gold (liquid & white)

Literal & Metaphorical

Natural & Supernatural

The Fantastic Fusion of Art and Science

Let me begin by sharing stories worth starting with.

Two of the common Creation Myths are based on stories about the transgression of divine commandments.

According to the Greek mythology, God Prometheus stole the fire from Mount Olympus. Then he brought it to the humans — his creations, made from clay and soil, illuminated with Athene's spirit. With fire, they received an ultimate tool and the foundation to develop culture and craft. Punishment: Pandora's Box for the humans. Diseases and suffering. Prometheus was bound to a rock and exposed to an eagle which constantly ate his renewing liver.

The first human beings in the Jewish and Christian religion were Adam (also made from clay, just sayin') and Eve, living in the Garden of Eden, until they were seduced by the snake and over-indulged in curiosity. They tried a fruit from the tree of knowledge and had to pay for this. The price they paid was getting kicked-out of paradise. Long-term consequence: the hereditary sin for all human beings.¹

Science meets imagery.

In this meeting of the two, I see the necessary ground for protecting the human sensibility, which I think is essential to be able to experience fascination and wonder.

Quoting the Munch Theophilus, editor of the major scripts about art and craft in medieval times, Adam and Eve lost their privilege of immortality, breaking of the rules but winning the "dignity of science" by gaining knowledge, which results — in addition to diligence and talent — in artistic practice.²

The step into investigation can be a decision to cross borders and to leave the comfort zone ...in Adam and Eve's story more or less involuntarily. Nevertheless, it is a decision driven by curiosity, the thirst for knowledge, and development.



Female figures, origin unknown, ivory, ~12 x 4 cm, Wellcome Collection, London. *Made as anatomical figurines, but so tiny and delicate that I see them more as art objects, pieces of jewelry or toys than objects of science. But does this need to be distinguished?*

In the previous stories, hard punishments came along with the tools and mind-set for a new access to art, craft and science. I see a deep and central dialogue between these disciplines, which can differ and be used as a kind of tool, whether to understand or to build upon the other.

In my understanding, the fusion of art and science involves many central parts of the human body — hands, heart, eyes, brain — and it requires a good balance between logic and a receptiveness for the things beyond. Maybe balance is not the right word for a successful fusion. Let's try mind-set, since one field is built upon facts, while I would base the other one on intuition, emotions, personal desires and facts, which are filtered through the creator as well as the recipient. Art, in my eyes, cannot be objective and does not need to appear logical to everyone. Science, to a certain point should be.

Therefore, in a successful fusion, fantastic things can happen within this game between facts and poetry. It requires a certain amount of naivety and openness to consider the ability to enrich facts and answer these open questions with imagination. Science meets imagery. In this meeting of the two, I see the necessary ground for protecting the human sensibility, which I think is essential to be able to experience fascination and wonder.



An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump, Joseph Wright of Derby, 1768, Oil on canvas, 1.83 m x 2.44 m, National Gallery, London (Image section)
This painting caught me, for several reasons. One is the cruelty of the experiment, which hides behind the picture's beauty for a moment. My reaction as soon as I grasps the situation was a shocked laughter. And humor always wins.

¹ *The Bible*, Genesis 2:4 - 2:24

³ Museum Kunstpalast, *Kunst und Alchimie*, 2014, p 11 (translated)

My Craft, My Superpower

One connecting aspect within the wide fields of art and science can be the desire to understand or create realities by completing a picture about how the world is structured.

Or might be structured.

Or could be structured.

Or should be structured.

How is my world structured?

I wrote the draft for this paper during a period, in which I haven't had access to workshop space or material. It didn't take a long time to notice, not for the first time, that my world consists of, and is structured through making.

I make ceramics and I perceive my education and practice as a significant privilege.

However, I have an ambivalent relationship to things and the production of things. I am a craftsperson and storyteller with all my body and soul. The creation of new matter and the ability to materialize thoughts and visions is an act that fills me with enthusiasm. It always has. However, there is a but. In recurring doubts, I question my creation of more and more matter. It is this discrepancy of value when making and consuming that bothers and triggers me. I truly enjoy ambivalent and inconvenient situations because they keep the brain active.

I came across the maker's mission statement of the ceramic artist Jennifer Everett and adopted it.

"This shit lasts so make it good and make it mean something."¹

I have an educational background in porcelain design, but I increasingly need to extend the boundaries of this practice. So, I came to Konstfack with the blurry proposal to go back into my own porcelain history and investigate my pure and naive material fascinations.

My craft focusses on porcelain, which is a personal material choice and based on genuine allure and fascination. My hands can materialize my thoughts. Giving experiences a physical appearance and a use for others is something I perceive as a true superpower. So I try to make it mean something and I want to tell you a story.

From Rock to Object

It happened that a hole in the ground in the south of Japan became a comprehensive turning point—a former mountain, transformed into delicate objects.

Arita, a small town in the south of Japan, is intense. Arita inhales and exhales porcelain. The specializations are eclectic, the characters impressive. It is the place where I spent my exchange semester and the place that shaped me deeply.

The Japanese porcelain production started in 1616. Korean potters entered Japan through the harbors in Karatsu and Nagasaki in the early 17th century, and started to teach their skills, which already had a long tradition on the Asian mainland. They used rocks from the surrounding mountains to produce stoneware. Then the Izumiyama Mountain was found in Arita, which had the necessary ingredients in an ideal relation to produce porcelain mass.² Some minerals needed to be extracted, but that was everything.

Now the mountain is a hole, but Arita still manufactures an impressive amount of porcelain objects and tableware. To see the leftovers from this mountain—porcelain in its natural appearance—surrounded by this mass of (delicate) things this mountain was transformed into, shaped my way of working.

This is because it reminded me of what porcelain actually is in its basic form and how amazing it is to have the ability to process it. I rediscovered porcelain as a natural and supernatural material and this discovery is the core of my Masters project.



★ Porcelain produced in Japan originated here at Arita's Izumiyama quarry with the discovery of kaolin stone (the raw material of porcelain) by the Korean potter Ri Sam Pei in the beginning of the 17th Century. It is said that the whole mountain has been turned into ceramics. The Izumiyama quarry was designated as a national historic landmark in 1980.

About Gold and Goals

I would like to give you some homework. There is a book, written by Edmund de Waal, which I want you to read. It is called The White Road and (here he lowered his voice)... it is a bit boring. He wrote another one, which is quite interesting, but you can read that later. Start with that one, because he uses the language you are looking for. You don't need to read it all.

I'm paraphrasing, but nevertheless, this is the introduction my professor gave me for my first homework. I never finished the book, but I made it far enough to come across the sentence de Waal formulated to describe his allure to porcelain:

"It is in the category of materials that turn objects into something else. It is alchemy"³,

With the expression of alchemy, I finally got a better word than *magic*, which I used before to describe this ... something, when it is about making and using porcelain.

Alchemy is a wide and branching field, but I noticed quite fast that I found a complex web of ideas and visions, that connects to my way of working and being, as well as to my perception of the environment I am moving through.

And this is how my research began.

I am investigating the core philosophies behind alchemy more as a concept than a science and look at its timeless thought of enlightenment and immortality through a successful transmutation of the structures that surround us. The focussed goal in the original process: Reaching or creating the best. Wealth. Immortality. Enlightenment. To pry into the historical investigations, as well as those found in contemporary settings. But the alchemical gold differs from what we are aiming for today.

The knowledge, seen from today's perspective, was quite limited and the goals were close to megalomaniac. There was the need of imagery and experimentation to gain knowledge and reach what the ancient alchemists were striving for. Our knowledge grows constantly and at some point we can experience the next step, which is often the idea of optimizing what is understood.

Knowing, having, improving. Not only an ancient, rather a timeless approach.

Therefore, I looked into alchemical, artistic, sociological and psycho-analytical investigations to collect views on theories about subjective gold.

My research questions cover questions from every thread I am going to follow and cover my theoretical and practical inquiries:

What are contemporary alchemists striving for and how might gold look like today?

How can I transform rocks and mud into ceramic material?
And how does that look?
How does that feel?

How can a vessel be communicated as a container not just for liquids, but also one for stories, symbols, and gestures?

In theory, I am investigating trials of striving for higher goals and the superhuman image. I interview people in my close environment about what contemporary alchemists are working towards and collect thoughts on what modern gold might be, and might look like.

In praxis, I am illustrating conflicts of humans striving through small kinetic machines and investigating my very own alchemical transmutations of rocks into (white) gold.

Consequently, I create objects as solutions for mastering these conflicts occurring through human limitations, and consider the possibilities of finding wealth in the small things.

My motivation for this project is this mix of curiosity and excitement for a frame, in which I can play freely with my material allures. The single questions have no hierarchy and are strongly connected. However, each question does intrigue me independently.

I don't expect my key questions to be entirely answered or my ambivalent relationship towards my practice to be solved. I don't expect gold and enlightenment. I perceive these questions as a greater guidelines and all I hope for is an open mind for every possible outcome, with the opportunity of getting stuck at one point of investigations.

¹ Everett. *Why Do We Make What We Make*.

² Nakagawa. *Clay mineral associations and mineralogical properties of quartz in some pottery stones of western Kyushu*, 1993, p 331/332

³ de Waal, *The White Road*, 2016, p 14

⁴ Roob, *Alchemy & Mysticism*, 1997, p 123

“In reference to the divine work of creation and the plan of salvation within it, the alchemistic process was called the Great Work, Opus Magnum.

In it, a mysterious chaotic source material called *Materia Prima*, containing opposites still incompatible and the most violent conflict, is gradually guided towards a redeemed state of perfect harmony, the healing Philosophers Stone, or Lapis Philosophorum: First we bring together, then we putrefy, we break down what has been putrefied, we purify the divided, we unite the putrefied and harden it.”⁴

Alchemy is about a lot—the big thoughts and small things. During the process, three aspects became outstanding:

Alchemy is a philosophical approach and social phenomenon.

Alchemy is a process of craft.

Alchemy is a long and exhausting investigation.

Theoretical Investigations

History

Psycho-Analytcs

Arts and Craft

Alchemy is a philosophical approach and social phenomenon.

My theoretical research shall look upon the core ideas behind ancient alchemical investigations and take a translation of those into the contemporary setting of the 21st century. I am translating from my position as a craftsperson, living in Central Europe and I am translating with my eyes, brain and hands.

The translated sources shall be chosen after personal interest, the character of connection and direct impact on this project.

The observed subject is a branching one and within this project and essay, many surfaces will be scratched, hoping that one surface can be opened for deeper research one day soon.

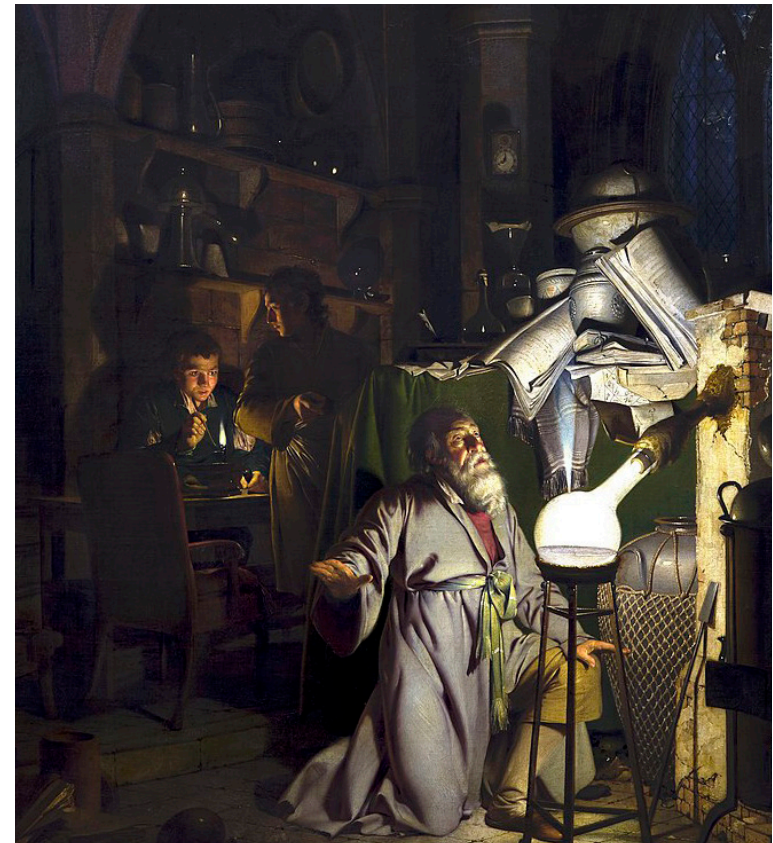
Somewhat true, but that is just a detail from a branching science, consisting of several practical and philosophical threads that are woven into each other, building up a flexible construct that offers the possibility to be read in several interpretations. The fundament of alchemy is based on the theory that all existing matter is a fusion of primary substances in different constellations and relations.² The human beings and their products were specified as micro cosmos, the surrounding and superior nature as macro cosmos. Both in a constant exchange and transition, influenced by the four principles of fire, earth, air and water.³ These primary substances can be extracted and in a further procession cleaned and newly combined in a controlled way. The result is new, precious matter.

Historical investigations

or: Searching for the unspecified object

In China, long ahead of Anno Domini, the alchemical investigation started.¹ This investigation combined central questions and disciplines, great goals and a sympathetic mix of curiosity, philosophy and madness. It is an old science with a great impact on our society.

The common knowledge about alchemy is probably this “from lead to gold”-thing.



The Alchemist, discovering phosphorus, Joseph Wright of Derby
1771, 127 cm × 101 cm, Derby Museum and Art Gallery, Derby

And that is the goal. The Opus Magnum, The Great Work. The successful process of transition is called transmutation. This transmutation goes together with finding the Lapis Philosophorum, the Philosopher's Stone. A "mysterious entity" with the ability of further transmutation of matter-living and non-living.⁴ Like the controlled creation of new life. Lead into gold. A materialized support for the extension of human limitations. How? Beside the materialistic appearance, every existing object owns something immaterial: a quintessence, a spirit. The Lapis Philosophorum can merge them both — shell and content, material and immaterial — with the consequence of mastered conflicts caused through limitations, infinity and through that enlightenment and immortality for the maker.⁴

The story of alchemy is a story of obsession, voracity for knowledge and wealth, and a continuous striving for higher goals. And it is a story, told by the desire of crossing borders, beating finity and having entire control.

The imagination they used to fill their gaps of knowledge is impressive and although there are many aspects one could discuss; I can't help myself by being deeply impressed and inspired.

The first reason that made me get stuck on alchemy was the image of the person in the laboratory, getting lost in the flow of material investigations. "The laboratory process was believed to purify both the chemical materials and the alchemist himself".⁶ This pinpoints what I experience in the workshop, when hands and brain are completely involved and full of clay. Purification. This concept of Enlightenment through the transformation of matter offers a precise description of the flow I perceive and the connection to craft-related processes is obvious.

Furthermore, I was, and still am, intrigued by the idea of creating the Lapis Philosophorum as the outcome of the laboratory process, this unspecified object, which—when thought through carefully—masters all the conflicts we are confronted with through our physical and mental limitation.

But is it mainly this ambivalent fascination for the naive-megalomaniac and desperate visions of understanding and controlling all the structures within this universe and the desire of

constantly improving what we have and topping the goals we set, that caught my attention.



Le Médecin guérissant Phantasie, Matthaeus Greuter, 1620, Bibliothèque nationale de France

The eclectic alchemical practice covers more than chemical investigations.

The medical man heals phantasy shows a situation, which I understand as the considered necessity of removing the ability for fantasy to make space for facts and knowledge instead. As if they would be mutually exclusive.

The situation makes kind of sense, when considering that pure knowledge was the desired goal... but I can't see alchemical investigations without the use of a great amount of fantasy and think that the apparently contrasting ways of perceiving the world are feeding each other.

With sympathy, empathy and critical eyes, I continue my research and focus on reasons for timeless, alchemical strivings. I found a vibrant presence of alchemy in psychoanalytic theories, contemporary art and interwoven into social structures.

¹ Levere, *Transforming Matter*, 2001, p 2-3

² Museum Kunstpalast, *Kunst und Alchimie*, 2014, p 24 (transl.)

⁴ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 1

Psycho-Analytical Investigations

or: becoming a *Unio Mentalis*

The Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustaf Jung (1875 - 1961) relates to the alchemic belief that the union of opposites—like sun and moon, male and female, solid and volatile—results in finding this object of desire and *wholeness* is what it creates.¹

In his theory, the integration of opposites is the fundamental issue behind the struggle for meaning and fulfillment. Opposites such as body and spirit, as well as consciousness and unconsciousness. “The confrontation of the two positions generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third entity ... a movement out of the suspension between opposites.”¹

Jung relates the modern aim of individuation—a harmony or agreement between the conscious and the unconscious—with the earlier alchemists’ quest for union and conjunction.¹ He states that the works and writings of alchemical investigations can be read as trials to find the *Unio Mentalis*, which, “in psychological as well as in alchemical language, means knowledge of oneself.” A stage that can be achieved through the synthesis of the single fragments of personality and, through this, a conciliation with the macro cosmos.¹

There are several descriptions and theories about these moments of being a *Unio Mentalis*, which is a subjective process and state. I am researching and writing from the position of a maker. According to Rachel Bloomer, ceramic artist, artistic practice can “be a tangible link for the union of consciousness and unconsciousness, whereby the unconscious and its archetypal contents push outwards into consciousness. Thus, the two psychic states strive for equilibrium[...]. This potential wholeness operates in a two-fold way — both upon the artist in creating the work, and in the created object itself.”²

Or, to use the simplifying words from the Japanese philosopher and historian Soetsu Yanagi about craft practice: “Those who have achieved an enlightened state of mind are free of distracting thoughts; they are at one with their work.”³ And consequently, the work becomes charged with the invested energy.

What a beautiful thought! The idea that the materialized result from a moment in enlightenment becomes charged with the makers energy is thrilling.

As a maker, I read Jung’s *third entity*¹, in this context, as the act of creation and I like Bloomers idea that the physical result of being a *Unio Mentalis* is and remains charged with the energy while making. Like the Lapis Philosophorum, which is a product of enlightenment and can, further on, create exactly this.

¹ Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites*, 2004, p 69

² Bloomer, *The Alchemy of Potting*, 2002

³ Soetsu, *The Beauty of Everyday Things*, 2019, p 47

Artistic Investigations

or: Healing and speaking through materiality

A translation, continuation, or quotation of alchemical research into the art scene has always enjoyed a great popularity, through sharing the same processes or being an inspiring topic. The connection between alchemy and art started in ancient Egypt. The art of dyeing and coloring has its roots in the belief that a change of color changes the entire quality of matter.¹ A long contribution and influence from alchemy into several other sciences and disciplines like chemistry, astrology, medicine, philosophy and psychotherapy followed. Ah, and not to forget the invention of European porcelain 1709 in Meissen by Tschirnhaus and Böttger during trials of creating gold.

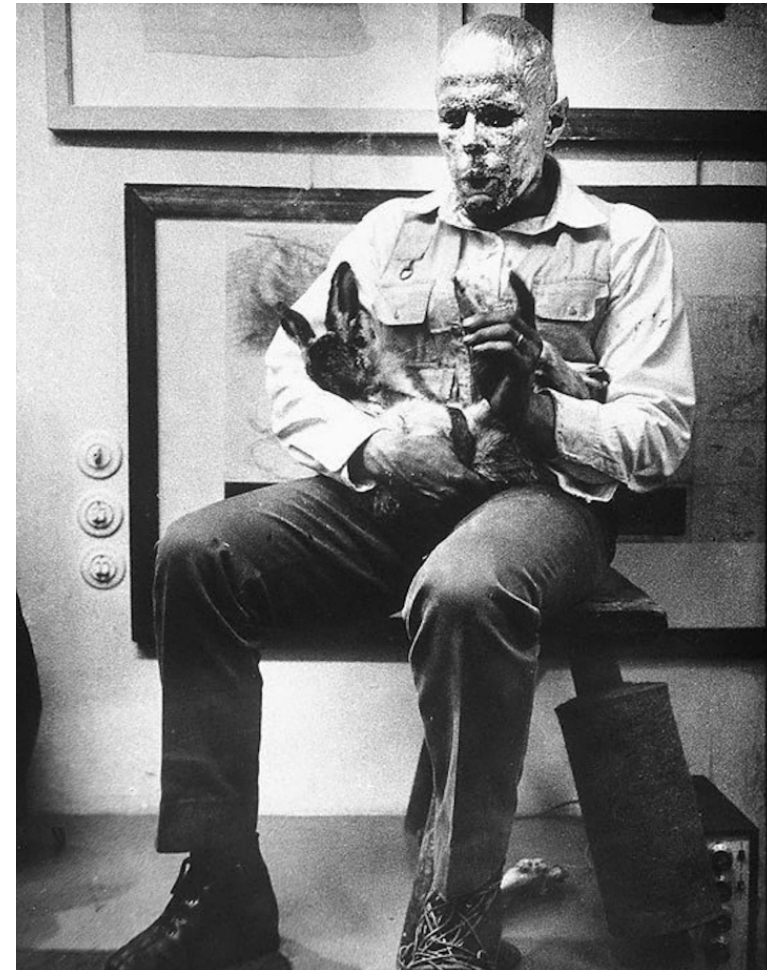
The “superhuman image of the Renaissance alchemist and magician”² had been transferred onto the image of thinker and maker in different fields and into the art scene in specific. From the early 19th century, the expression *artist-magus* was established through artists such as William Blake, and John Flaxman², describing the person and act of creating a new reality or extending the existing. Since alchemy is such an eclectic science, philosophy and methodology, several artists located themselves within this investigation by having materialistic or contextual references to it. “Alchemy, in fact, appeals to those artists who wish to explore matter and material culture in preference to a conceptualist practice with a diminished, or completely absent, art object.”³

The reference doesn't need to be obvious. Once my research started, alchemy was everywhere.

My project is influenced by two artists, whose practices seem to be very different, but Joseph Beuys and Edmund de Waal are united not only through alchemical connections. They both bring actions of healing and gestures of care into materiality and create their very own language through the charge of materials they use, which is both highly personal and universal at the same time.

Joseph Beuys and liquid Gold

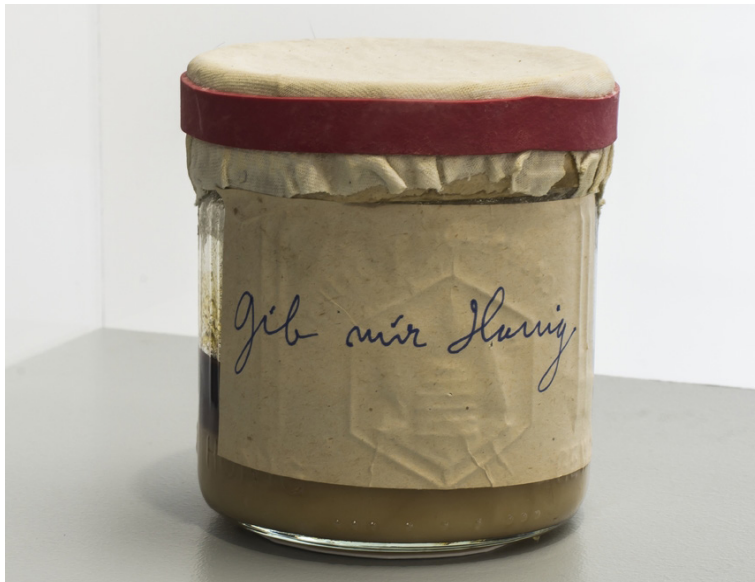
The conceptual artist Joseph Beuys (1921 - 1986) has influenced my thoughts and actions since I got in touch with his practice ten years ago. What impressed me immediately and innocently, was the poetic, although clear, language his works spoke through the choice and combination of material.



Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare), Performance, 1965, Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf
With a face coated in gold and honey, Beuys spends hours explaining the world to a dead hare, his symbol for reincarnation. Healing through thoughts.

The German artist regarded his practice in the light of a spiritual activity, as an alchemy that would contribute to the development of human consciousness.⁴ He made use of alchemical symbolism and practice “as an effective political tool.”⁵

In the idea of redemption for the atrocities of the war period, he used his practice as an act of cleansing, not by belittling the history, but by involving his audience in a process of re-engaging, healing and strengthening.⁶ His eclectic practice includes investigations within the fields of politics, education and social sculptures. Beuys identified himself as a shaman, who is in his very nature a healer, attempting self- and world renewal. He used mainly “primitive substances” in his *Aktionen* and installations—such as butter, honey, felt and domestic items like used batteries and medical debris.⁷



Gib mir Honig (Give me honey),
10 x 9 x 9 cm, 1979, mixed media, Hall Collection, NY

The critic Donald Kuspit describes Beuys' artifacts and materials as “art at all”, for the regress to an era when art objects were magical⁸, what I read as a belief or reference to the perception that materials are art pieces in themselves and receive a frame or narrative through Beuys' process. His work was a development of currents within the *Arte Povera*⁹ movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The central idea of *Arte Povera* was the use of

poor, simple materials, involved in the everyday life of so many. The materials were mainly chosen according to their healing contribution to body and spirit through warmth and protection. “Beuys used fat as an alchemical material. It was both chaotic prime matter and a healing substance.”¹⁰ And honey, that, “like gold, indicated transformation of the brain and of thought”¹¹.

These substances are both contributing to human health in an abstract and precise sense, but they are also materials that have a similar need, which is one fundament of a healthy spirit: Warmth to stay viscous, flexible, shapeable, reflective and curious. A cold environment makes the matter (and us) stiff, solid, old and stuck in ways.

My attraction and fascination towards Beuys' practice are mainly connected to his choice of strategies to deal with the question about what a spirit needs to be healed and stay healthy. In words, materials and gestures.

We all have our history and experiences. Background and environment have a constant impact on us, and I think it needs a great amount of (self)reflection to see, understand and conclude from this impact.

It is one thing to reflect and deal with your story in a personal way, another one to offer a beneficial universal impact. Although his works are secondary or irrelevant for me, Beuys accompanies me for many years now. His similes made their way into my life. How often did I tell myself: *I must be like honey*.

He creates a universal language and vision within his art, which offers individual access to his philosophy. It inspires me a lot to find a way of offering my thoughts, so that others can enter and maybe benefit from them in their own way. Sometimes, it is not about the object, but about the story it contains.

¹ Museum Kunstpalast, *Kunst und Alchimie*, 2014, p 13 (transl.)

² Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 1

³ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 8

⁴ Kuspit, *Beuys: Fat, Felt and Alchemy*, 1984, p 349

⁵ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 5

⁶ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 68

⁷ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 67

⁸ Kuspit, *Beuys: Fat, Felt and Alchemy*, 1984, p 347

⁹ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 67/68

¹⁰ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 71

¹¹ Kuspit, *Beuys: Fat, Felt and Alchemy*, 1984, p 154

Edmund de Waal and white Gold

Beuys' words have been with me for ten years, de Waal's for 14 months. But my professor was absolutely right in assuming that he uses a language, which pinpoints my material fascination. The British potter and writer Edmund de Waal (1964), focuses on aspects of the material's stories in academic and practical investigations by "bringing particular histories of loss and exile into renewed life."¹ De Waal's practice celebrates the history, aesthetics and preciousness of porcelain through installations and writings, which are influenced by poetry and turned back into "Physical poems."²

"What do I love about.... well, it is as close to magic as you can get with any material. It's ... it's mud, white mud and yet, it turns into something translucent. [...] It is completely that white object that you probably find in everyone's kitchen and it is also the princely material of every emperor. So, it transverses all these different things and ideas and then it is seductive in your hands. You pick it up and it's gorgeous."³
Nothing more to add.

Porcelain, as the simple substance, is already a highly charged material and deeply connected to alchemical processes. "Porcelain and the Philosopher's Stone were most analogous in that they were talismans: valuable not just in and of themselves but because of what they represented"⁴—and that is simply the most desired physical matter. Originated in China, porcelain speaks of more than thousand year of history, of tradition, craft, transcendence, delicacy in its highest form.

The fascination for this white, translucent material in Europe was immense. "Porcelain was so valuable and rare, that it was said to have magical properties[...]"⁵

Invented during alchemical research by Johann Friedrich Böttger (1682-1719) and under the supervision of Ehrenfried Walter von Tschirnhaus, this White Gold was the "alternative" to the Element, which August the Strong originally ordered. Since the trials of transforming cheap metals into gold were not very successful, he changed his assignment for the young Böttger, who he kept in prison during the process.

The Elector of Saxony collected ceramical objects from China and Japan on a big scale and suffered from the "Porcelain sickness,"⁶ as he said about himself. Under his authority, the first white porcelain was fired on the 15th of January 1708.⁶



Johann Friedirch Böttger, alchemical gold and silver regulus, 1713
Gold d 36mm, Silver d 41mm

These samples of pure gold and silver were created on the 20th March 1713 in Dresden, under the eyes of August the Strong. Böttger spend in total 12 years in captivity of the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland. This "success" is the proof that August didn't lose his trust in Böttgers skills for more than 10 years and made him continue his research into the creation of gold after the invention of porcelain.⁷

Porcelain sickness. What a fitting expression for this addiction, which jumps between something positive and negative. Porcelain in my perception is so fascinating, because it is both a natural and supernatural material and de Waal describes it so well with saying *It is as close to magic as you can get with any material.*³

The content of our works differ, but I refer to and am inspired by de Waal's practice, as I too perceive porcelain in itself as a material that is charged through its origin. Many quotes from his books stayed with me and colored my practice. Quotes like the Chinese expression that porcelain goes through 70 Hands⁸, or that "Cobalt allows the world to be turned into stories".⁹



Morandi (installation view) 2017, porcelain, aluminium, plexiglass
Artipelag, Stockholm 7 April – 1 October 2017

While it is magic, at the same time it is as de Waal formulated so nicely: *It's white mud*.

"Porcelain clay must be a precious substance to be valued so highly; we are prepared to think that it is very rare. Not so. The basic material of clay—largely feldspar and quartz—covers three quarters of the surface of the earth. [...] Clay is mud, the most humble of materials. It is the exact substance of the earth. It is the soft stuff that squishes between our toes."⁵ European porcelain was invented during laboratory processes, in which cheap matter was supposed to be transformed into precious material. In this specific case, the transformation can be considered as successful, although the found gold was not the originally desired one. Porcelain demonstrates that something considered as *mud* can—through scientific and practical research and through human hand—become something extremely precious.

By concluding that the long path of practical alchemical investigations shows indeed bigger and smaller successes and is not only an ancient inquiry, I end the theoretical investigations here and continue with the praxis by going into my own laboratory.



Tacet (detail), 2020, porcelain, alabaster, gold, aluminium, plexiglass,
71 x 22 x 18cm
New Art Centre, Wiltshire 21 September 2020 – 9 January 2021

¹ <https://www.edmunddewaal.com/resources/profile>

² source follows.... it have it... somewhere.

³ de Waal, Audio Interview with Grant Gibson in *Material Matters*, 2019

⁴ Adamsson, *The American Arcanum*, 2007

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/edmund-de-waal-and-the-strange-alchemy-of-porcelain.html>

⁶ <https://www.meissen.com/en/geschichte>, 18.11.2020

⁷ Museum Kunstpalast, *Kunst und Alchimie*, 2014, p 33 (transl.)

⁸ source follows.... it have it... somewhere.

The 70 hands, mentioned in this phrase, symbolize the amount of persons involved in the several steps of transforming minerals into porcelain objects.

⁹ de Waal, *The White Road*, p 60

Practical Investigations

Process / Opus Magnum

Observations / Higher goals

Creations / Lapis Philosophorum

Alchemy is a process of craft.

The practical research builds upon the theoretical, in which the strong desires within alchemical investigations, and an adaptation of its processes into fragments of psychoanalytic theories and arts, were explored.

Now, it is this strong desire of having entire control in the process of creation and consequently receiving an object of unspecified appearance and function that shapes this practical chapter.

I am investigating enlightenment as the state of existence that the alchemists were striving for: Enlightenment makes a man become a superman—through knowledge and the resulting ability of control. To assume that then—with help of the materialized outcome— everything will be good, is simple trust. This contrast of control and trust is triggering.

I am carrying these approaches into the studio, where I intend to try a lot: I try to experience the attractions of transforming matter, I try to empathise with the desires for higher goals and I try to conclude from that knowledge by creating physical objects. These laboratory outcomes are designed in the idea of the Lapis Philosophorum and perceived as experiments or illustrations of my key questions, for whose answers I am working between control and trust.

Is it possible to process minerals into a mountain? This practical investigation is an experiment into the artificial creation of natural matter.

69.17% Quartz, 15.0% Aluminium_dioxide, 3.45% Sodium_oxide, 1.15% Magnesium_carbonate, 3.15% Calcium_oxide, 0.39% Titan_dioxid, 1.05% Iron_trioxide, 2.48% Iron_dioxide, 0.1% Manganese_oxide, 3.01% Potassium_oxide and 0.13% Phosphorus_pestoxide¹; This is the Izumiyama Mountain in Arita, Japan.

Opus Magnum

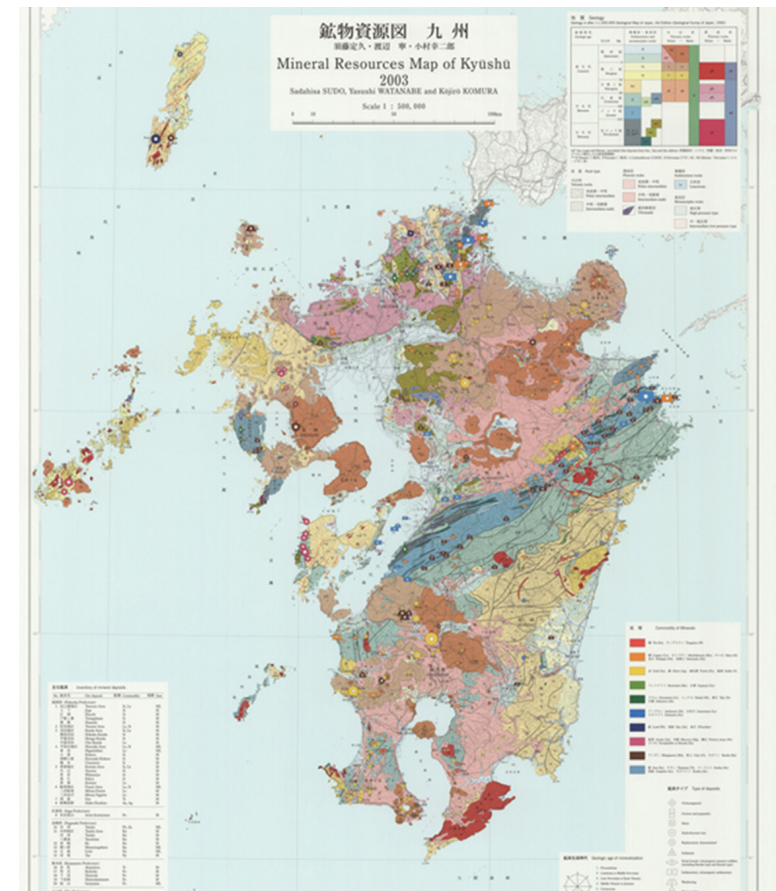
Process

According to alchemical beliefs it should be possible to create matter by combining the necessary ingredients in the correct relations. Making the Opus Magnum means beating nature: From lead and copper to gold. From human, organic substances to the Homunculus and artifical or reanimated life.

From rock and mud to ceramical material? My (white) gold? In my practical investigations, I am intrigued to test the process of transformation. There are two geological substances I have a deeply personal connection to:

The Izumiyama Mountain, which impressed me so deeply and actually shaped my artisitc practice. A mountain, that disappeared and became an amount of precious object, which I can hardly imagine.

The other one is the ceramical and grey-muddy material, which I dug out when I was young. And older. Me and my brothers made pots from it and covered our skin, sure, that this mud will heal us (see image p 27). The material is taken from an island, which I connect to everything that contrasts alchemical approaches. So, I take these two substances—natural, cheap matter—and into my laboratory to transform them.



Mineral Resources Map of Kyuchu, 2003

The geological conditions in the south of Japan are ideal for the production of porcelain clay. The Izumiyama Mountain was the first that was discovered .



Leftovers from the Izumiyama Mountain. This simple looking rock has the potential to be transformed into porcelain. Imagine! Arita, Japan, 2018

Fragments of this mountain sent to Stockholm and fired in three different temperatures. From top to bottom: raw, Red 1260°, Oxi 1280°C, Oxi 980°C.

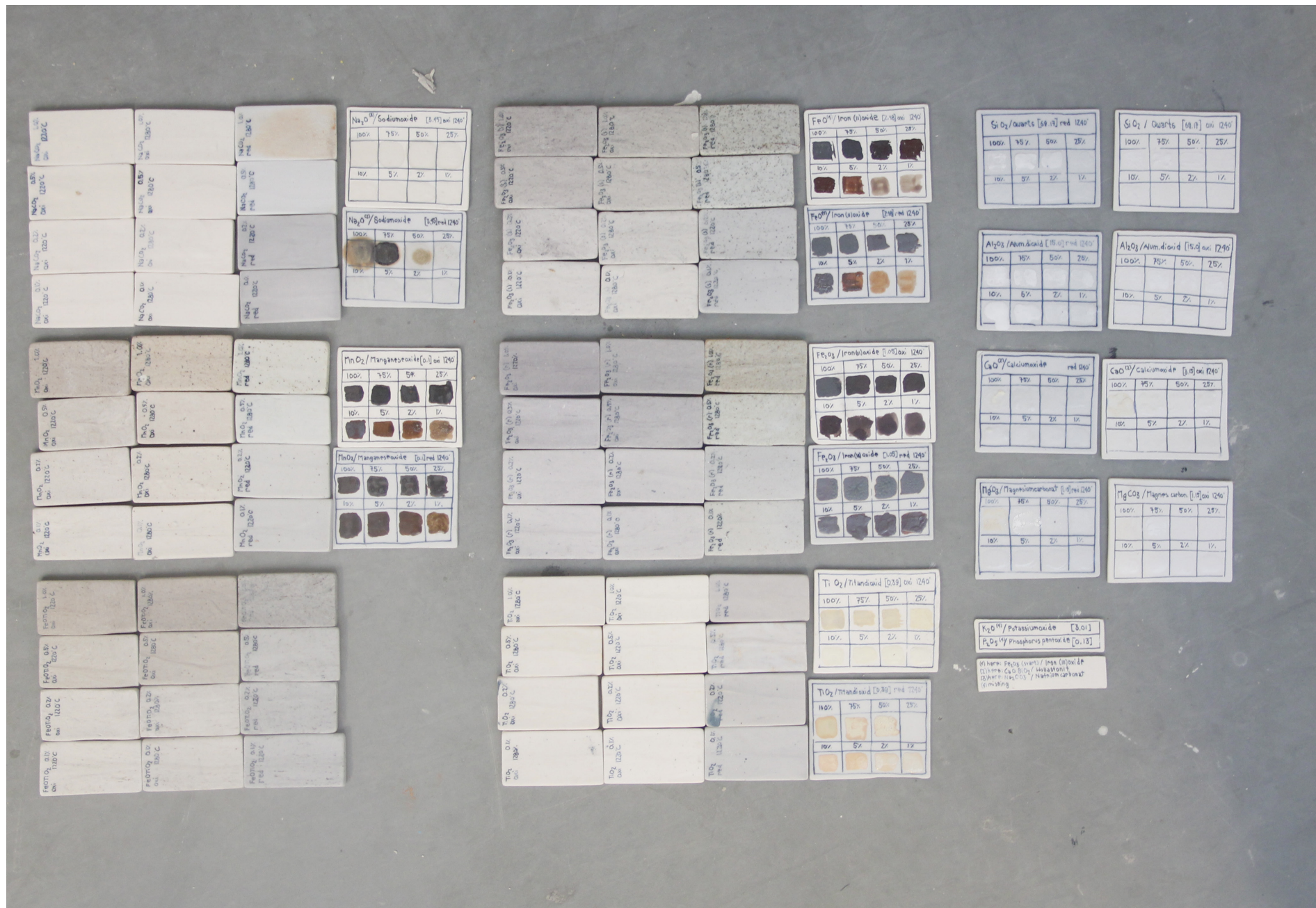


Process

The fundament of alchemy is based on the theory that all existing matter is a fusion of primary substances in different constellations and relations. These primary substances can be extracted and in a further procession cleaned and newly combined in a controlled way.²

The following pages show test pieces, fired in different temperatures in reduction and oxidation kilns. The natural influence of time is here compressed and replaced by the influence of heat. The primary substances as well as the minerals in the correct relations mixed into porcelain slip, porcelain clay or transparent clay. The additional material had the simple function to give a shapeable body, pure in color.

What follows is an observation of the aesthetics and the question how close the Homunculus Mineralia can be to its original.



Observation of the extracted colors

Minerals, which are extracted during the process of making porcelain clay:

1. mixed into the clay, from 0.1% to 5% of mineral weight in relation to the clay. Oxidation & reduction. 1220, 1240 & 1280 °C / 2. applicated onto a porcelain tile, from 1.0% to 100% of mineral weight in relation to slip. Oxidation & reduction. 1240 °C.



Observation of the combined minerals

The minerals in their correct relation, according to *The Geology of Japan*¹

1. mixed into slip, constantly increasing with 5g in 100ml slip to a total amount of 500 ml slip. Oxidation & reduction. 1260 °C. 2 mixed into slip, constantly increasing with 5g per cast, while the amount of slip reduces with every cast until it disappeared.



Observation of the combined minerals
The minerals in their correct relation, according to *The Geology of Japan*¹

mixed in transparent glaze on porcelain, from 1.0% to 28% of mineral-mixture in weight relation to dry glaze. Reduction. 1260 °C.



Observation of the combined minerals

In their correct relation¹ on porcelain bodies. Different liquidiates. Oxidation. 1230 & 1280 °C.

Conclusion

Is it possible to process minerals into a mountain? Following the thought of the Homunculus, I tried to reconstruct the Izumiya-ma Mountain, and I failed. That is not a big surprise. Although similarities and small successes can be found (when forced), by the trial of reconstructing a mountain I achieved a range of aesthetics which are more theoretically and objectively connected to the origin and focused goal. Some delighted me, some disappointed me.

Reflection

What does it mean to try to reconstruct a mountain?

It means to try beating nature. In this case, it means using minerals from a mountain from the other side of the world.

It means ignoring the ultimate and irreplaceable influence of time, pressure and chemical reactions. It probably means also to unappreciate the enormous amount of energy that was invested to mine this mountain, to process the rocks and transform them into all those delicate porcelain objects. It probably could mean to criticize the negative consequences of consumption. I write probably, because this is what one could think, but what was not intended with this experiment. I tried to reconstruct the mountain, because I wanted to experience the alchemical megalomaniac thought of being able to cultivate nature or being as powerful as it is (feels great and escapist).

What does it mean to try to create gold and human living? It definitely means playing God². It also means to test one's own capabilities. I wonder how the real alchemists took their failures...

¹ Moreno, *The Geology of Japan*, p 332

² Deeply inspired from the idea of the Homunculus is Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) *Frankenstein, or The modern Prometheus*, published in 1818. The novel looks at Frankenstein's the successful experiment of creating new living and the relationship from the maker to his creature, which is colored by hate, ownership, sense of responsibility and guilt conscience.

This novel connects to my experiments, in that in both processes the maker tries to copy "god made" creations or even exceeding, but mainly that the creature / objects becomes charged with a very specific and emotional value, although the result might not fulfil the expectations (if there were any).

From mud to gold

I cannot reconstruct, but I can collect rocks and turn them into ceramic material. Following the idea of the Opus Magnum, I try to understand the structures of matter, to use this knowledge and transform cheap matter into noble material. The two materials I am working with are already (subjectively) deeply charged.

One material is the original, which I tried to reconstruct. Fragments of the Izumiyama Mountain, the root of my artistic practice. The trial to make porcelain using the entire material.

The other material is collected malleable sea-mud, with which I shaped my first vessels when I was small and with which I covered my skin in the insurance that it will benefit my skin. The beginning of my ceramic career. The trial to make stoneware in a more professional way more than 25 years ago.



20 years earlier: My brother is wearing—and later throwing—the original clay, freshly dug out from the sea. A beautiful, slimy grey clay.



After a firing in 980°C, all organic material is burned, the grey turned into a bright terra cotta color and the crushed material can be milled in a ball mill, until there are only the finest particles left. Redundant water can be skimmed, after the particles sank to the ground.

Process

The process of transforming rocks into ceramic material is a known process, clear in its structure. In several steps, the material undergoes a transformation in temperature, structure, color and consistency.

The final result was then whether processed and fired purely or mixed into porcelain slip, porcelain clay or transparent clay. The additional material had the simple function to give a shapeable body, pure in color.



Observation of the color range
Dried and roughly milled clay, wedged into porcelain.

From 0.5% to 20% of mineral weight in relation to the clay.
Oxidation & reduction. 1240, 1260 & 1280 °C.



Observation of the color range

Casted cylinders. Processed clay, mixed into porcelain slip and applied to the surface.

1. In six steps and intuitive amounts (due to the reason of unconcentration) of the added clay. Oxi, 1280 °C. 2. Surface-treatments with liquid and dry clay, Oxi, 1260°C & 1280°C

Conclusion

What differentiates my process from the professional production of ceramic material is the simple approach of observing the outcome instead of striving for the best result. I did not discard unnecessary and disturbing material, which influences the consistency, shapeability and color. Instead the approach was to work with what I collected.

I conclude with a thrilling enthusiasm and with many surprises. I am surprised by the variation of colors from the fired rocks in different temperatures and therefore even more surprised by how white the result of the processed Izumiyama mountain came out, although no redundant minerals were extracted.

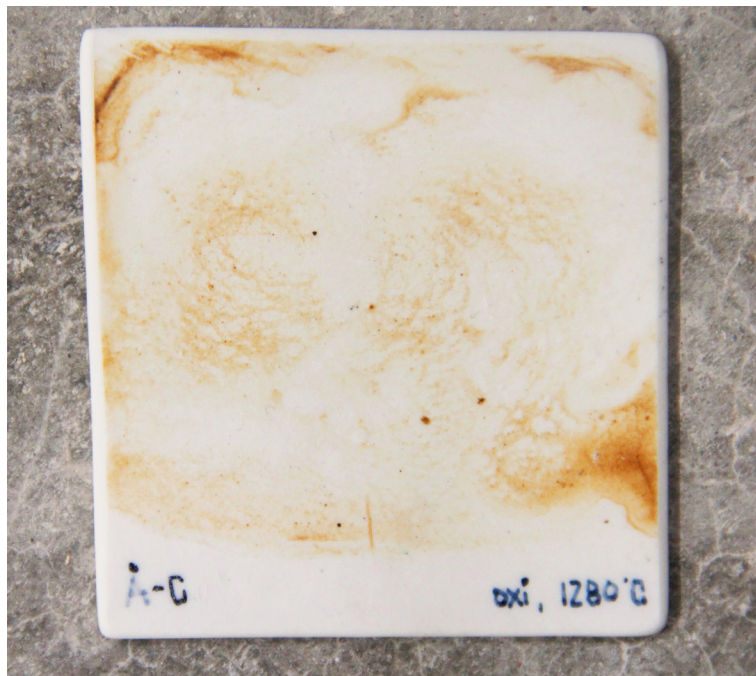
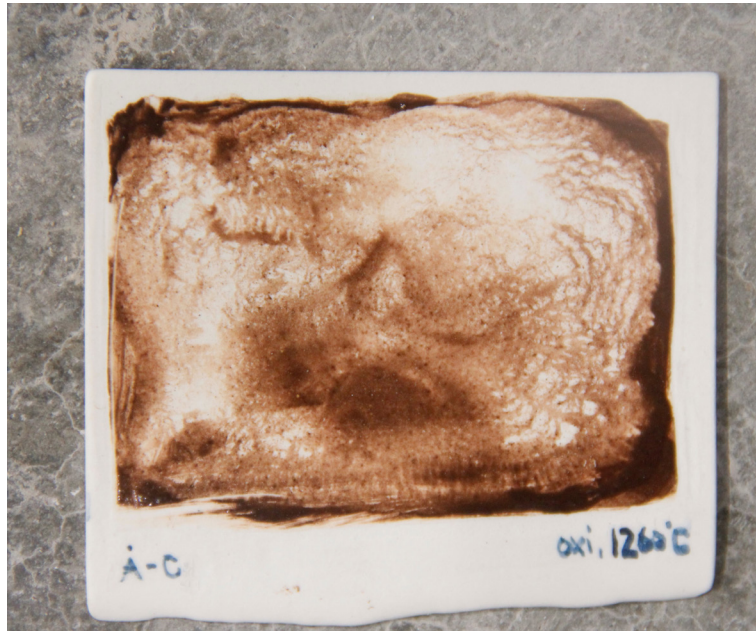
I am surprised to see these silent, glossy and golden landscapes, the natural clay from Åland builds up on the white surface of the porcelain, emerged from this grey slimy material I dug out from the sea.

Reflection

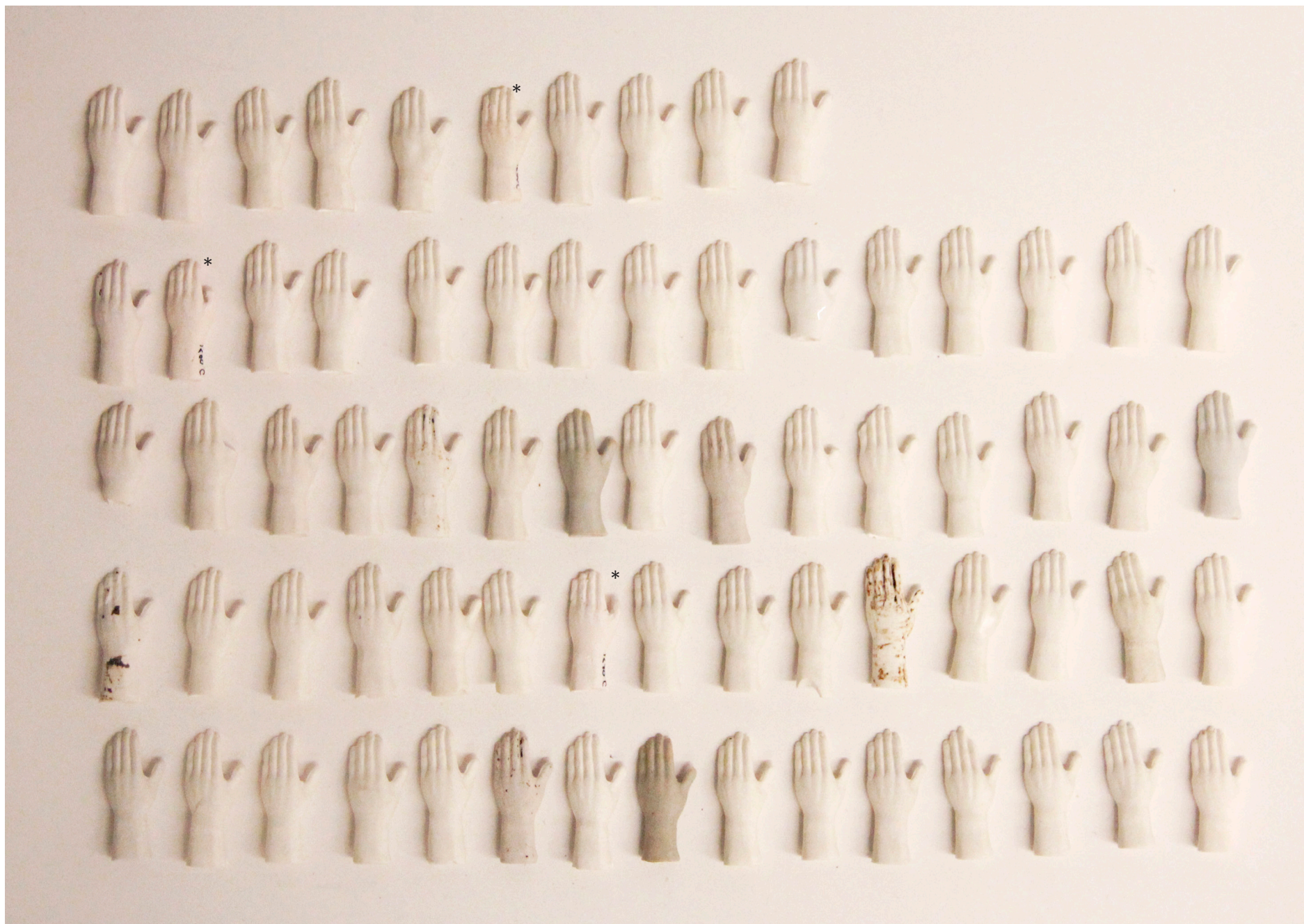
The process of producing clay and glazes is known, well explored and highly professionalized. But still, to do these processes, to follow these steps and see the result is thrilling! I feel pride for every single fired piece and am amazed by seeing all these variations of final colors and plasticity of the mass.

The position of being an observer of what happened is quite convenient in a way. The goal was not to achieve the purest result possible, the goal was to experience what it means to transform matter from the beginning to the end and to value the whole source.

It means to both have and get rid of control and I must confess, I really like that dialogue. I wonder how open the real alchemists felt towards these material dialogues...



The milled, liquid clay on porcelain tiles. The structure emerged through slow moving of the particles on the soaking basis . Oxidation, 1260 & 1280°C.



Porcelain goes through 70 hands.
Inspired by the Chinese expressions, I casted hands everytime I casted a test cylinder.

* These hands are made from original fragments of the Izumiyama Mountain. I processed the stones, made porcelain mass from them, and received these hands as the high-fired results of self-made porcelain. The mass still includes all the minerals, which are usually extracted.

Higher Goals

Observations

The connection between alchemy and crafting processes is obvious, while the reasons for this maniac striving and the focused goals are intriguing fields for my further contextual investigations, since I perceive these approaches and processes as a phenomenon, which involves not only makers.



Ikarus Collection_A kinetic illustration. Porcelain, metall, glass, found objects, illumination. 2020. 180*200*20cm

During the research, I developed mixed feelings towards the superhuman image these men in their laboratories were aiming for and still today many people do. *Mad* and *lost* were attributes I connected with historical and contemporary trials of reaching the set goals and associated (alchemical) strivings with risking mental sickness instead of experiencing satisfying success. I saw the alchemical investigation as a historical trial that failed, since the Lapis Philosophorum was never found and the Opus Magnum never realized, but now I came to a different conclusion as well as I need to correct the use of the word “failure”. Who said that the investigation had already ended? Striving for something higher, bigger, better is not just a historical phenomenon. We—humans—just developed the techniques and revised what the Great Work might be. That this process feels so familiar and timeless is highly interesting and therefore worth a closer look. I find myself in an environment, in which standing still and being ordinary are attributes which are faced with fear or misunderstanding.¹ Like in a daily competition, life seems to be about beating oneself, beating others and beating the environment. People are still looking for gold and I find myself in a world which is burning out.



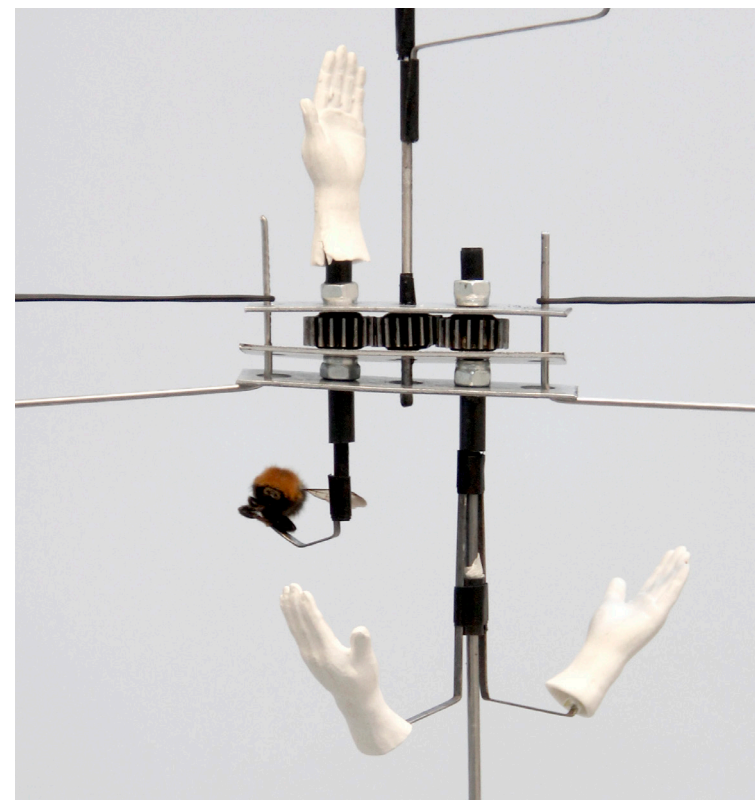
Ikarus Collection_ *Graveyard of enlightened moments*. Porcelain, glass, broken bulbs. Illuminated.

Gold is the shadow of the sun.²

This quote triggers two contrasting thoughts with great impacts on this project.

1 / Motivation and Security.

As with almost everything, I think that goal-oriented behavior needs to be balanced or mindfully dosed to be good for us. In the last months, I changed my attitude towards this behavior and I now truly believe that, in the right dose, it is contributing to our mental health. Specific literature and my own lifestyle made me realize how motivating and therefore essential goals are—at least in our western culture. Let them be universal or individual.¹⁰



Ikarus Collection_ *Circulating around narrow and wide axes*. Porcelain, metall, bee.

In *The Meaning of Things*, the authors discuss the concepts of being a person, which is a very basic analysis and therefore essential for understanding and a further development of thoughts, when considering that having and following goals is deeply connected to our existence.³

The sociological investigation is set in urbanized America in the 70s, but reading it changed my perception of goal-oriented behavior and it is important to mention it here.

“From our perspective [from a sociological] the most basic fact about persons is that they are not only aware of their own existence but can assume of that existence, directing it towards certain purposes.”³ And these purposes are ahead of us. *Cultivation* is an active “process and interpretation of self-control motivated by goals rather than origins”⁴. *Cultivation* is described as a psychic activity that is only possible because humans can focus their attention selectively and with intentions. Without intentions, we could have no meaningful information, no direction and there would be no movement.



Ikarus Collection_Movement through focus, Pt1. Plastic, metall, glass, bird wings. (Object discarded)

The term used for the ability to focus is *Psychic energy*.⁴ That energy can only be released, when intentions are not in conflict with each other⁵, when they can just “flow”.⁶

In the case of conflicts, we lose direction and with it the ground for mental health and natural development. A “disorder of attention”⁶ ends in Chaos.



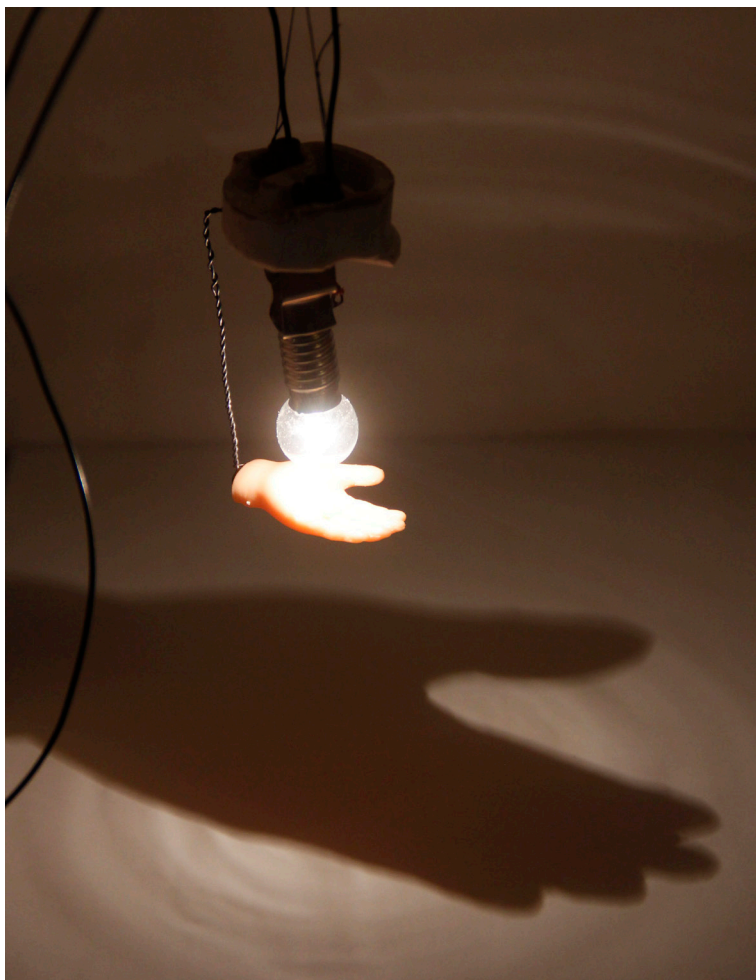
Ikarus Collection_Movement through focus, Pt2 / Straight up but no raising. Porcelain, metall, bird wings.

Conflicts are what the alchemists tried to master, because they lead to a distraction of their energy.

The alchemist's conflicts were based on the need of wealth, knowledge and immortality and located in or between the micro and macro cosmos⁷. Our conflicts might differ and accrue on the personal, social, or cosmic level⁸. But no matter how or where these conflicts appear, as soon as they distract our flow, they need to be mastered, so that our energy can be invested into what we focus on and what keeps us moving. Remember the honey.⁹

I shortly summarize my thoughts about alchemical investigations with a: Yes, they were extreme in many ways, but nevertheless very human.

*Gold is the shadow of the sun*¹⁰ and light and warmth are attractive because they are essential for life. This quote makes me think about energy through light and warmth, the need of constant refills and therefore an instinctive attraction to their source. What if it is not about material gold? What if gold describes the subjective value, which simply spends us energy?



Ikarus Collection_My sun is not your sun. Plastic, metall. Illuminated.

2 / Danger and Uncertainty

The imagery, which the first alchemists used, in which they were maybe thinking, offers a clear picture of what the goal is.

With today's knowledge, we know that it is physically not possible to transform cheap metals into gold and that there is no problem-solving stone. Having goals outside the box is what I understand as one important ingredient for human and individual development. However, there is a danger in this. Since I read this quote, I couldn't stop thinking about the case of Ikarus. He was attracted to the sun, ignored his father's warning and we all know how his story ended.



Ikarus Collection_Trapp. Glass, Ceramic, bee. Illuminated. (Object discarded.)

But that story can't tell us that following our instinct is something one should not try. No goal, no movement. I would just throw out the statement that standing still is not what lies in our nature nor that it is contributing to feeling balanced and satisfied. Once we reached a goal, we might take a moment to rest to then move on towards something that seems to be brighter.

However, I want to differ into goals based on desire and on essential needs. Allure is what I connect with instinct and passion; being in need is more essential and probably goes together with a desire of improving the present. Ikarus was allured by the beauty, the alchemists were in need of finding wealth and knowledge. That is a big difference, anyhow the borders are fluid and the consequences thrilling or killing.

So, the concluding question is: How can we protect ourselves from unrealistic goals and avoid burning (out)? We are now leaving the comfort zone of defined destinations and universal goals. Wealth became an abstract or individual entity after Nietzsche's discovery, that God is dead. The unifying sun got lost¹¹ and several individual cosmen appeared.



Ikarus Collection_*Solar System*. Porcelain, metall, plastic, bird wing.



Ikarus Collection_*Ego Cosmos Pt2*. Metall, plastic, bird wing, found elements.



Ikarus Collection_Sunrise and Sunset-to-plug-in. Porcelain, metall, plastic, copper, bird wing.

I am intrigued by the question, what the contemporary alchemist—which we all somehow are, I guess—is striving for and asked.¹²

I did so for the simple reason of curiosity and for the theoretical research to be reality-checked. I also did so, because I am motivated to collect ideas about protection from burning and a refill of our energy-resources instead.

¹ In the book *The Society of Singularities*, the German sociologist and cultural theorist Andreas Reckwitz (*1970) analyses the transformation from the general into the extraordinary as one desirable character in our western late modern age. He calls this phenomena *singularization* and describes it as more than just independency and self-optimization. Central is the “complex striving for extraordinarily and uniqueness, which to achieve became not just a subjective desire but a paradox social expectation [...] within the new, high qualified middle class.” (Reckwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten*, 2017, p 9 (transl.)

² Hermes Trismegistus, 2nd century AC, Alchemist

³ Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton *The Meaning of Things*. p xi

⁴ Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton *The Meaning of Things*. p 4. The authors even go so far and state, that “Personhood depends on the ability to allocate one’s psychic energy freely. An individual cannot become a person if he or she is unable to cultivate his or her goals, and therefore the shape that the self will take.” I think this statement is interesting, but too ultimate in eyes.

⁵ Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton *The Meaning of Things*. p 9

⁶ Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton *The Meaning of Things*. p 10

⁷ Museum Kunstpallast, *Kunst und Alchimie*, 2014, p 14 (transl.)

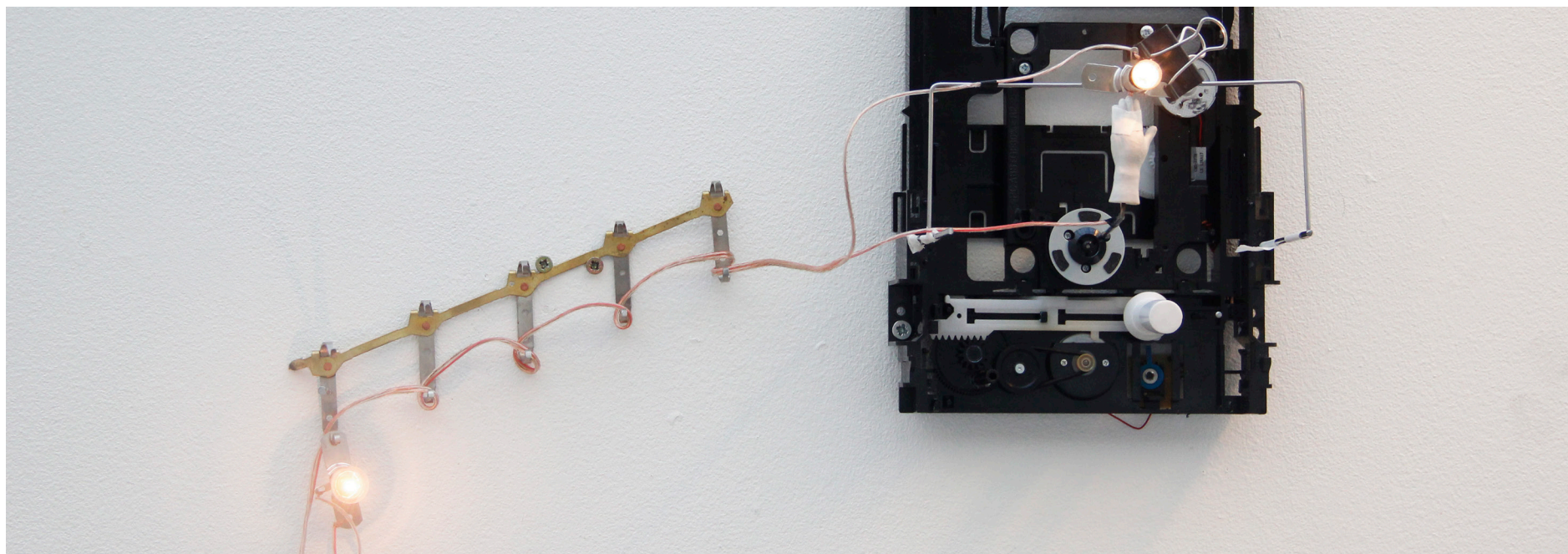
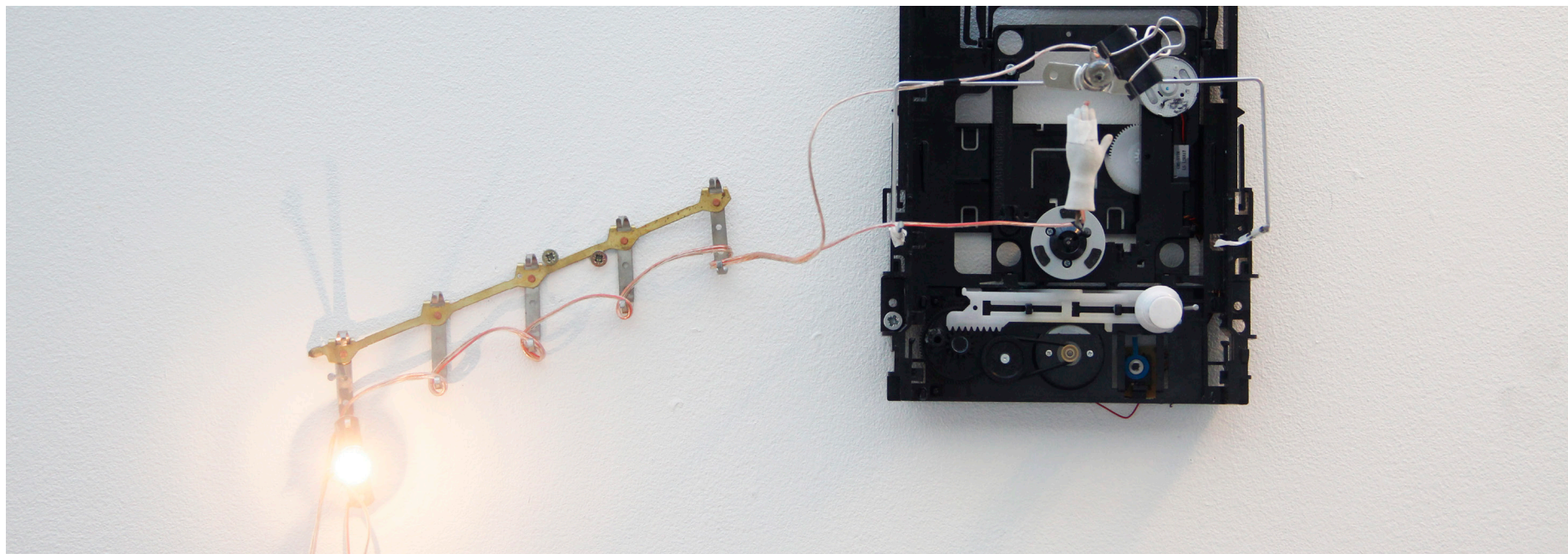
⁸ source personal, cosmic, social level... follows!

⁹ Joseph Beuys compared the human mindset with the consistency of honey. Warmth--in a literal and metaphorical sense--keeps the consistency viscous and in flow, what is important for an active, curious, young and through that healthy mentality. See essay p. xx.

¹⁰ Hermes Trismegistus, 200 AC

¹¹ In *The comfort of Things*, The British antropologist Daniel Miller (*1951) discusses the consequences the consequences of modern social structures. Modern anthropology as a phenomenon is built upon secularization and Enlightenment. According to Miller does Living under *Nietzsche’s Death of God* mean to live in a society that risks a fragmentation into mere isolated individualism and a loss of any sense and order.⁶ We don’t need a universal God to structure our life, but it happened that humanity created its own gods through rituals in the need of a structure’ purpose and goal (Miller, *The Comfort of Things*. p 283)

¹² *Collecting Gold*. Interviews with people in my close environment; discussions and thoughts about goals, gold, striving and pausing. Sperate publication. Insights, see *Lapis Philosophorum*, p38, and *Conclusion* p46



Ikarus Collection_100=2.50. Porcelain, metall, plastic, cupper, Illuminated.

Lapis Philosophorums Creations

The desired object: the Philosopher's Stone. The supertool for the superhuman, something that masters our conflicts through creating perfect harmony. What a thrilling thought. One thing is now that, as the goals are individual, the supports are too. My gold is not your gold and conflicts can be mastered in several ways. Another thing is that there are several strategies one can follow when deciding on the function of this supertool object: it can spend the energy for a later release and active process in realizing the goal or it can eliminate the conflicts straight away.

Gold is the shadow of the sun. This statement by Hermes Trismegistus, one of the most influential alchemists from the 2nd century AC, made me see that gold can actually be a simile. So, I collected thoughts about how gold might look like and what it shadows, what people are striving for and how they pause.¹ The strategies are various, but they are united in that the conflicts need to be excluded, to find time to rest and gather energy. Since conflicts can occur on the personal, social and cosmic level, the supertool needs to balance the problematic situation. When conflicts occur on a personal level, other persons are included in the process of finding value and rest. Or alcohol. When conflicts occur in the social or cosmic level, the world needs to be narrowed down and these levels excluded. For instance through sleep, through actions or tastes connected to childhood and comfort, through focusing on positive, immediate (kinetic) feedback to experience success and awareness of our physical existence.

Gold is the shadow of the sun. The sun spends energy through light and warmth. Literally and metaphorically. The following pages document six trials of creating Philosopher's Stone and are results from throwing my alchemical ingredients in one pod... or one kiln:

light and warmth;

white, liquid and immaterial gold;

gestures and actions
of (self)care and comfort;

history and future
but always the now and here

for objects of function
and meta-function.

Object N°1_FEEDING CUP

An act of care

“Small and delicate, these cups for feeding infants span continents and millennia. (...) This simple vessel is a(n) (...) old expression of care and nourishment.”¹

Being fed, being filled with love and energy. What a wonderful thought, what a beautiful and intimate act. Especially when the vessels are so delicate, that they truly honor craft, tradition, act, giver and receiver. This object shall materialize, and through that speak about, caring actions.

To communicate the core of this vessel, I worked with the visual appearance.



Materializing care through a pattern, which in the German culture is associated with Grandma's tableware and communicates on an emotional level.



Materializing care through making this pattern by using the natural, carefully processed clay from Åland, charged through its origin and process.

To communicate the core of this vessel, I experimented with the handling.



Materializing care through taking care of the wounds, which the vessel experiences in the leatherhard, very fragile stadium.



Materializing care through forcing a careful handling.

Object N°2_HONEY CONTAINER

A materialized gesture

Liquid gold and the taste of comfort. A product of community. A substance that calms down as well as it provides energy. Honey. Joseph Beuys compared it with the ideal state of a healthy, young, and curious human mind. With this object, I want to give you honey.



Liquid honey flows as soon as the stick is lifted. A release of the stick cuts the honey and closes the opening. A tiny hand saves the last drops for you.



If the honey got solid, it requires the warmth of your hands for a while, until it gets smooth and can move again.

Object N°3_ INSULATOR.DYSFUNCTIONAL

A question of (no) control

The original prevents the uncontrolled dash of energy. Energy can be destructive. Even so fundamental. This replica is dysfunctional. No energy, no movement. No development. Energy is rarely visible, nor controllable. Energy needs to be released, but where into?

This object is a metaphorical tool and its only function is to push a thought.



An object that changes its content with its context. Although scientific, it is not really functional, more associative. Sometimes I see an active heart,

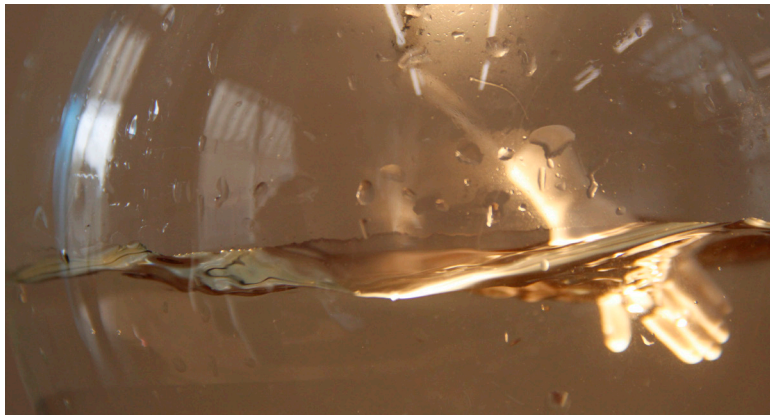


sometimes a mysterious egg.

Object N°4_ TWO LITRES OF ALMOST THE HAND IN THE SEA

A machine against approach

Being confronted with pressure, approach and stress distracts the flow and causes chaos. Immediate, kinetic feedback can help to focus on the moment and rest from the pressure for a while. Having the hand in the ocean is through the sounds and reflections one of the most calming actions I know. This object should bring the relaxing benefit of moving water and actions with no approach into every environment.



This is a complex machine and all it can do is make waves and through those wonderful light reflections on the wall.



The sea can happen in your mind, did you know that? We just have to remember the feeling, close the eyes and listen. It is the shadow of the ocean.

Object N°5_TILE-STOVE TO-GO

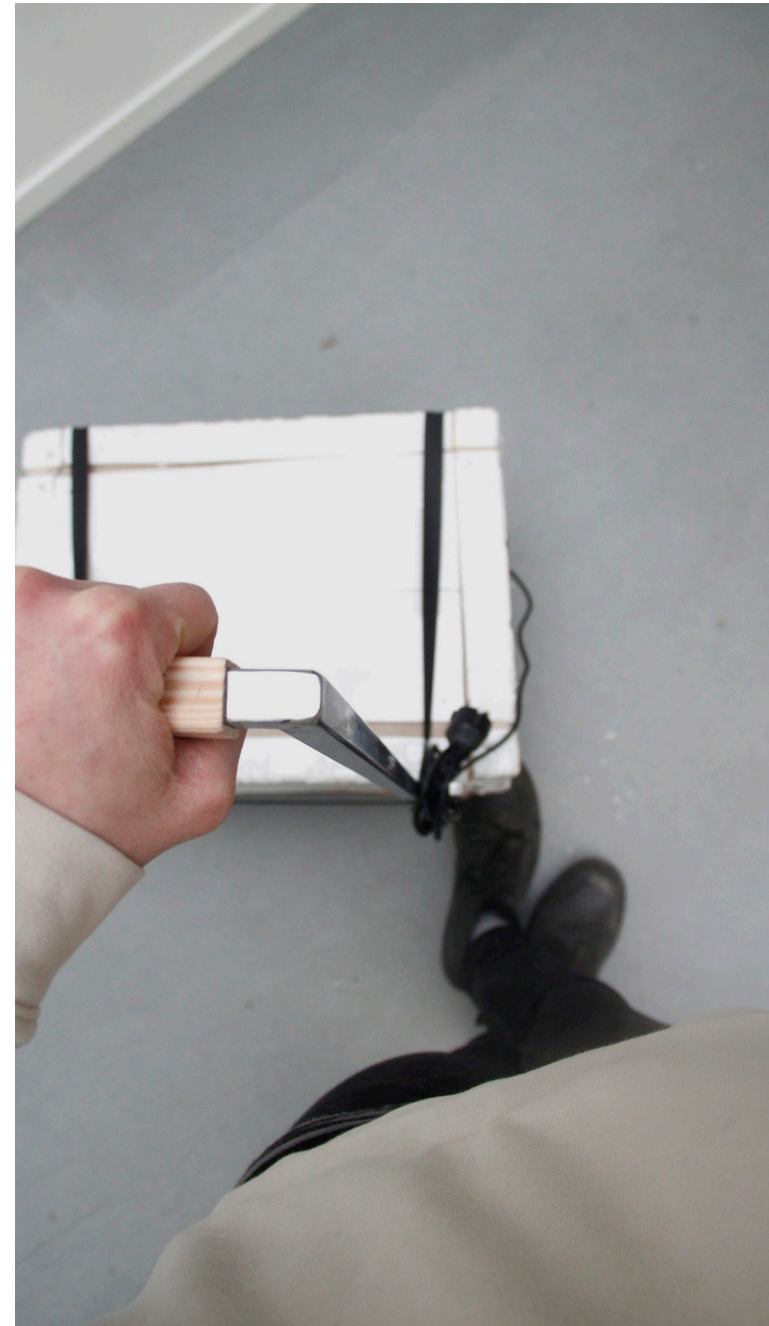
A comforting paradox

First you need the house, then you can adjust and build the stove, which fills all rooms with warmth. A stove, the heart of a home. A stove to-go is a paradox in itself, but a striving lifestyle is also paradox. Especially when it prevents from having a stable place to find security. But a microwave-size-heart always fits. It can be perceived as a pale shadow of the original, or as a modern interpretation.

This object should support our ways, through its ability of spending warmth as the mobile heart of the house.



This hand-carved pattern is taken from a ceramic object, which materializes my very personal notion of home and comfort.



A convenient and contemporary stove, through you can just plug it in and it gets warm quickly. It is handy, it is mobile, it is strong enough to sit and rest on.

Object N°6_MORGENSTUND

A ritual of optimism

Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund. When looking for a translation for this proverb, you find *Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.* [Benjamin Franklin] Washing your face and starting into a new day, filled with optimism. The right attitude can be the best start into the next investigation. And healthy, wealthy and wise is what we are looking for, right?



In the center is a big, thick, and partly cracked porcelain bowl; glazed with natural clay collected on the sea ground. Glass vessels keep the liquids in which the user



wants to take a bath and serve them on a fingertip. Which ingredients do we perceive as healing, for the body as well as for the mind? What do we want to wash our face in?

Conclusion

Theoretical

Practical

Further studies

Alchemy is a long and exhausting investigation.

Several months passed and the project is coming to an end. No, it is actually not but it reached a point, where the first conclusion can be made.

Looking at the three key questions, I will summarize answers I found so far.

Alchemy is not just an exhausting practical investigation, it is a giant web of disciplines and philosophies through centuries and I scratched only single surfaces. When looking back on these eighteen months in my laboratory of intuitive chosen material and theoretical investigations, I can already conclude that I developed a deep empathy for alchemical investigation through that I found myself in a thrilling flow of curiosity, enthusiasm, madness and overextension. And that alchemy is all around.

What are contemporary alchemists striving for and how might gold look like today?

To understand the attraction of and thrill through alchemical processes, I researched goal-oriented behavior, illustrated this through kinetic machines and discovered alchemy as a timeless and social phenomenon.

I slipped into the role of a 21st century alchemist is a sentence from my abstract. Yes, I slipped into that role and now, when I conclude this project, I conclude that I actually am or became or always was a 21st-century alchemist.

During this project, I was often asked, where I am in this work. Well, it is a work about me. Secretly and obviously. I cannot separate my work from myself and this project is one about the practice itself, scratching on the fundamental aspects of materiality, intention, and function. *An Investigation into Enlightenment* is therefore a project which I perceive as the creation of a fundament, on which I can build upon in further projects--a first step into knowledge and a trial of being receptive for the magic between art and science. The scratching is based on the fact that there was a lot I wanted to work with before deepening one question or technique.

Through relating to alchemical processes and inquiries, I found the ideal frame for the investigations I wanted to do without having the words for it. This project started with unsorted ideas, questions, and interests. Through the connection to an existing science and philosophy, I had a guideline, which directed and fed my process. My three key questions are formulated in the alchemical pictoriality, to ease an understanding of them and tie a thread through these three inquiries, which are very diverse but however connected. Small conclusions are taken and noted at the end of each chapter. I will now look back onto my key questions and try to answer them with the knowledge gathered in the previous months.

Alchemy is an intriguing thing. I feel caught in that I can identify with all these approaches of control, being the master over all happenings, working until the goal is achieved and simultaneously looking for the next step. In the beginning of this essay, I wrote *But it is mainly this ambivalent fascination for the naive-megalomaniac and desperate visions of understanding and controlling all the structures within this universe and the desire of constantly improving what we have and topping the goals we set that caught my attention.*

They caught my attention, because they connect to my experiences, which fill me with unbeatable enthusiasm, at the same time as I suffer under this constant approach of wanting and delivering more.

My story is not unique, and I perceive myself as a product of my environment and history. During the process, I observed myself, I read, and I talked to others. I collected answers to the question how gold might look in the 21st century and slowly feel able to tell these stories, which are too various to be shortly summarized. But repeating patterns can function as answers at this point.

Extremely interesting during my interviews was the fact that every asked person knew immediately what I meant with "your personal gold" and could answer that question really fast. One big relief is that gold turned out to be a subjective value, instead of a precious mineral. Gold turned out to be contained in small things, instead of being the big goal. Gold can be activities, involving close people, caring about oneself and each other. Gold can bring you to another place or back into another time.

Attentions, gestures. Reachable and some thing that balances the ongoing (alchemical) investigations. Gold are all these little treasures, energy spending entities, through which we collect the power to continue mastering our conflicts and projects.

While in the ancient science, mineral gold was the focused product, from which creation everything changes to the better, I got the impression that people are aware of what their very own gold is. But—when looking back at my first key question—is it actually gold, what we are actively striving for?

No. It is more likely one ingredient that accompanies our strivings and support us on the way, of which the destination is often pretty vague. Gold is the source of energy, which we need to master our way and its hurdles.

So, how to continue with this knowledge? I want people to not forget looking and grasping for gold, because I perceive this as still being the most precious thing.

I want to share stories through a personal but simultaneously universal language and offer access to ideas and philosophies through my artistic practice. And I want to give you honey.

How can I transform rocks and mud into ceramic material?

And how does that look? How does that feel?

To emphasize the feeling of transforming and controlling physical matter, I set my own laboratory. In there, I tried to artificially recreate a specific mountain and transformed subjectively charged, natural matter into even more precious, ceramic material.

This question is more concrete to answer: It is a crafty process and it feels awesome. The results are created by me, but I surrendered a lot of control by trying to give the material space. Some experiments and aesthetics were further explored and

appear in my final objects. I allowed myself to follow preferences, based on unconscious reactions towards results. Every single piece is a little treasure, just because it is what it is and that I transformed it myself. I could truly empathize with the fascination of transforming and controlling matter.

These experiments don't contribute to any common knowledge, don't offer healing qualities and I don't think that they are interesting for anyone without emotional connections to these rocks, stones and mud. Which is absolutely okay for me. These experiments are a gift to myself. Ah, and my mom. She got a piece, glazed with the clay from Åland. Her relationship to the island where it comes from is even stronger than mine. The way she reacts to the piece and how she treats and uses it shows that emotional connections and an active impact through new materiality can be created through the materialization of a story. That is interesting for the following key question.

This question, about how rocks can be transformed into ceramic material and how this transformation is sufficiently answered for now: it is possible, it makes me proud and the results are semi-controllable shades of grey, brown and gold.

The test results, as well as the process and final products, are from a deeply personal value. In some final objects, the metaphorical Philosopher's Stones, the different clays appear in carefully chosen spots. Integrating these materials is a trial of universalizing personal gold. I am not sure, if that is successful or not. These elements are from a purely aesthetic appearance, as long as the background is not told. And the background requires many words. Is it worth telling? And this leads me to the last, and to me, most intriguing question.

How can a vessel be communicated as a container not just for liquids, but also one for stories, symbols, and gestures? Which language could be used?

The concept of the Lapis Philosophorum is the one I got stuck on. It describes an object, which results from a process of control and comes with the ability to master all our conflicts. It is the object the alchemists trust in, the object that saves us. Based on the answers collected for the first question, I experimented with the creation of Philosopher's Stones.

While the other questions were practically explored during this project, this question asks for attention in a wider and further process. It asks more for methodology than content and my materialized answers function as tools to discuss those. The conclusion I take now is: I simply don't know. I started this project with the idea of creating Lapis Philosophorum in the end. Metaphorical Philosopher's Stones, objects with functions and meta-function to the benefit of their user. Benefit not in mastering conflicts, how it was expected from the the Lapis Philosophorum, but in a support to pause from them and collect new energy. The process of mastering conflicts cannot be universalized since sources and strategies are too subjective. But when considering the answers from the interviews, repeating descriptions can be collected. So, I created objects in which I materialized the collected gold, enriched them with my own experiences and intriguing aspects from my research.

For every single trial, a separate conclusion can be taken, but one aspect connects the successful trials. Concluding from theoretical and practical research, an emotional connection is necessary for a successful connection and a resulting impact. However this impact might look practically.

This connection can for instance be based on a shared story, like the Åland-clay-glazed bowl for my mom, which reminds her of afternoon coffees at the sea and through that activates the same atmosphere.

Or it can be based on knowledge about the symbolic or academic context, in which materials and shapes are chosen. Everyone who is familiar with Beuys' practice and his similes of honey can sense what "I give you honey" means.

To communicate through symbolism and academia, the object needs to meet a specific target group, but this is not satisfying to me. The thing is that emotional connections cannot be universalized. Probably communicated, but that consequence of understanding is not necessarily knowing, feeling, keeping. That is logical but bothers me anyway.

Communication happens through language. Which language can be used? I tried the language of words, of materials, shapes, traditions, and quotes, through handling, through function and act of use. I worked with both personal and common values and gestures.

I can't give any final conclusions at this point, nor judge over success or failure, since I know the backgrounds and chose the stories which I perceived worth telling, based on seeing a benefit in—or experiencing one through them. I materialized my own Philosopher's Stones, insecure if those should or could be tried to be universalized.

This project is dependent on feedback and interaction for further development. This question is the one I want to continue to study.

One immediate conclusion I can take:

During this project, I sensitized myself for gestures and attention. I spent more time and concentration feeding people with gifts in the appearance of words, time and food. The feedback was overwhelming. I therefore perceive my objects as illustrations of what I hope to be transformed into actions.

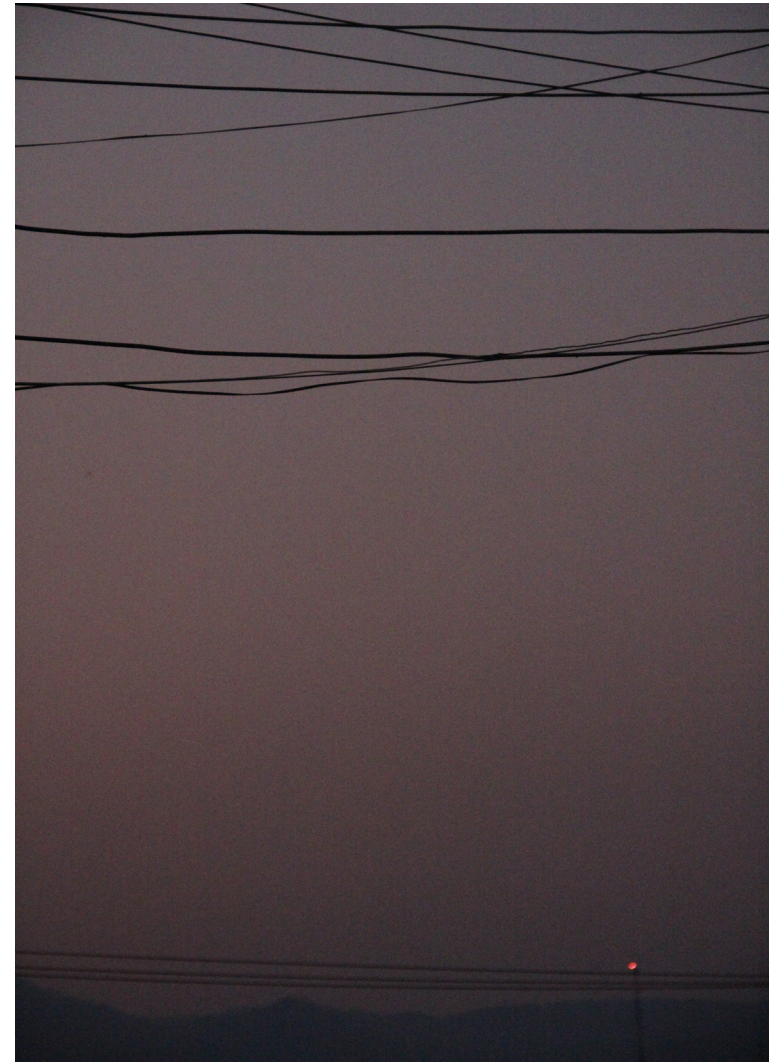
I finish my essay with a few words about this picture, which I used as an inspiration, guideline and background since the very first week of this project:

I was standing in Chiang Mai and enjoyed the wonderful sky and the dynamic black cables, to which aesthetics I have always felt attracted. I remember the delighted feeling, when I discovered the glooming sun at the horizon and had to think about my favorite poem *Bist du schon auf der Sonne gewesen?*¹ (Have you already been on the sun?) by Joachim Ringelnatz.

The poem gives an explanation of how to travel towards the sun and then the recommendation, to better turn around and go back home, when you can't make it that day.

My laughter once I noticed that the sun at the horizon is actually just a signal sounded probably a bit mad. The image of the traveler in the poem, walking towards the goal and reaching a bulb was so sad and so wonderful at the same time.

I conclude my research with the belief that having big goals is important, motivating, thrilling, killing, and hard; and that it can be good when they remain a distant goal, if the journey is a very nice, rich, and light one.



¹ Poem, German language, see *Fine Print*, p 48

Fine Print

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A Poem

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Cover Photography by Laura J König, Chiang Mai, 2019

pII Photography by Laura J. König, Chiang Mai, 2019

pV left: Photography by Laura J. König, London, 2020
right: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-wright-of-derby-an-experiment-on-a-bird-in-the-air-pump>

p9 Photography by Laura J König, Arita, 2017

p13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Alchemist_Discovering_Phosphorus#/media/File:Joseph_Wright_of_Derby_The_Alchemist.jpg

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p18 Kunst und Alchemy, p 33, scan

p19 left: <https://www.edmunddewaal.com/making/edmund-de-waal-giorgio-morandi#4>
right: <https://www.edmunddewaal.com/making/tacet#16>

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p22 left: Photography by Laura J. König, Arita, 2017
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right: <https://lipsiusbau.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/move-little-hands-move/>

pIX <https://vidarstiftelsen.se/manniskan-som-kulturskapare/>

pX Photography Gabriela Wassing, Järna, 2020

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pXII right: <https://www.cmog.org/bio/shelley-james>

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pXV left: Photography by Laura J. König, London, 2020
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pXXI <https://aworkstation.com/woodblock-prints-illustrate-the-history-and-sensuality-of-japanese-baths/>

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Bist du schon auf der Sonne gewesen?

Bist du schon auf der Sonne gewesen?
Nein? - Dann brich dir aus einem Besen
Ein kleines Stück Spazierstock heraus
Und schleiche dich heimlich aus dem Haus
Und wandere langsam in aller Ruh
Immer direkt auf die Sonne zu.

So lange, bis es ganz dunkel geworden.
Dann öffne leise dein Taschenmesser,
Damit dich keine Mörder ermorden.
Und wenn du die Sonne nicht mehr erreichst,
Dann ist es fürs erstemal schon besser,
Dass du dich wieder nach Hause schleichst.

Joachim Ringelnatz (1883-1934)

Appendix

Artistic contextualization

Index Lapis Philosophorum

Birds after Airpumps

Artist Statement

I am under constant influence of my environment, which is mirrored in my thoughts, words and works. Many influences happen subconsciously and so they were processed. Through their procession, I contextualize myself.

I am using the appendix for my artistic contextualization, which is worth defining. It differs from my artistic references, which are practitioners with a direct impact on my process and myself. The contextualization shall function as the frame, in which I want to locate my practice by sharing different aspects, like symbolic language, intended effect, audience. To contextualize myself gives me comfort and shows opportunities and ways to go.

Environmental influences can be found in the Index of the Philosopher's Stones, which I created in this project. I hope that these objects can speak for themselves. However, they are rooted in personal experiences, objects, and connections. I am sharing some of them in the hope to offer access to their stories.

The appendix ends with a look at the very beginning of this project and a picture, which didn't influence, but now beautifully illustrates the fascination for experiments.

ARTISTIC CONTEXTUALIZATION

For me, seeing the world is connected to a specific attitude and mentality.

And when I say seeing the world, I mean seeing the big things, small details and the invisible.

I mean, looking at persons, at objects, at situations, at questions and everything in between.

I mean moving through, acting in, communicating from, inviting into.

There are attitudes and mentalities I can connect to and which inspire me. I will list and comment on a few in this artistic contextualization. These persons and their thoughts did not influence my work in a practical sense, they more support and encourage me and confirmed my investigations in different, individual ways.

For Dorothea Strauss (*1960, Germany), art historian and curator, it is important to meet and experience art with an “innocent look”.¹

The unknowing this look incorporates should not be perceived as an obstacle, but a potential.²

Through contemplation and reflection, the innocent eye is challenged in what we perceive, think, evaluate, and conclude.² Through that we develop and grow. What is fundamental but can also result in stopping to take a closer look; to be open for curiosity, fascination and for finding beauty in the moment of not-understanding. The “innocent look” in Strauss’ perception is pure in an aesthetical sense; it describes seeing without any ulterior motives or prejudices.²

I agree in the importance of looking—not only—at art with an innocent eye, since I see in it the necessary ground for the perception of deep and honest fascination. It offers to see or think about the things beyond and in between, it feeds the natural poetry and makes life more fantastic, it offers access to this unique energy between perceiving, imagining and to the magic of the moment before the intellect kicks in. It is the place where Plato saw the origin of philosophy³ and I find comfort and inspiration.

I try to protect my own innocent look, while simultaneously trying to be realistic and experienced. It is a balance within myself, but also between me and my environment, the things I look at. I can’t differ between looking at art or looking at the rest of the world. This careful selection of artists and / or exhibitions triggered the purest and most innocent look in me and that is what I hope to achieve with my work as well.

Jan and Eva Švankmajer

James Turrell

Rebecca Horn

Sherry Turkle

Jan and Eva Švankmajer
and *Move little hands...* "Move!"

The impact of the practice from the Czech surrealists Jan(*1934) and Eva Švankmayer (1940-2005) is one I felt physically and immediately, when entering their exhibition in the Lipsiusbau in Dresden in Spring 2020. *Move little hands ... "Move!"* invited the visitor to enter their Wunderkammer, a surrealistic world, including stop motion movies, collages, paintings, installations, objects and kinetic machines. The works are sensual, overstimulating and highly involving.



Ceramic and wooden object, attached the note *Please touch*.

The couple's practice is eclectic, but a major part in their work is the film. "Jan Švankmayer once said that the advantage of film over the theatre is that once a film is made, it can simply wait for its audience"⁴

The other used media are painting, two- and three-dimensional collages, frottages and other graphical techniques, puppets, theater scenography, ceramics, three-dimensional ready-made objects and kinetic machines.

The Švankmayers impressed me so deeply because their work is so ultimate. To me, they obviously live what they do and illustrate their perceptions of a reality, which is unique and highly personal. In my perception their works do not mirror a fantastic thought, but an entire world, in which the audience is invited through sensual interaction. I felt care for the audience, while not making it convenient to follow the couple's imagery and language.



Two- and three-dimensional collages of creatures and ceramic sculptures, referring to alchemical vessels.

What approved and motivated my practice are specific sentences from the Decalogue, with which the visitor was faced before entering the exhibition. The Švankmayers shared their thoughts in wonderful explanations for attitudes, which I try to live myself and pass forward.

Decalogue (Extracts)

I Remember that there is only one poetry.
The antithesis of poetry is professional expertise. [...]

II Succumb totally to your obsessions.
You have nothing better anyway. Obsessions are relics
of your childhood. And from those very depths of
your childhood come the greatest treasures. The gate
has to remain open in that direction. It's not about
memories but about emotions.
It's not about consciousness but unconsciousness.
Let this underground stream freely flow through
your inner self. Focus on it but, at the same time, let
yourself go. [...]

IV Imagination is subversive because it puts the
possible up against the real. That's why always use the
craziest imagination possible. Imagination is hu-
manity's greatest gift. It is imagination that makes us
human, not work. Imagination, imagination, imagi-
nation ...

VIII As a matter of principle choose themes toward
which you feel ambivalent. That ambivalence must
be strong (deep) and unshakeable that you can thread
its knife-edge without falling off on one side or the
other, or, as the case may be, falling off both sides at
the same time. [...] ⁵

James Turrell
and *See! Colour!*

CONTEXT
IX

*For SEE! COLOUR! James Turrell has designed Scandinavia's first
and the world's northernmost Skyspace, the only Skyspace built
with a wood exterior. The inside of the Skyspace consists of a white
painted domed ceiling with an aperture to the open sky.⁶ This is
what the website says.*

More than eighty Skyspaces are spread over the globe and I visit-
ed one of them.



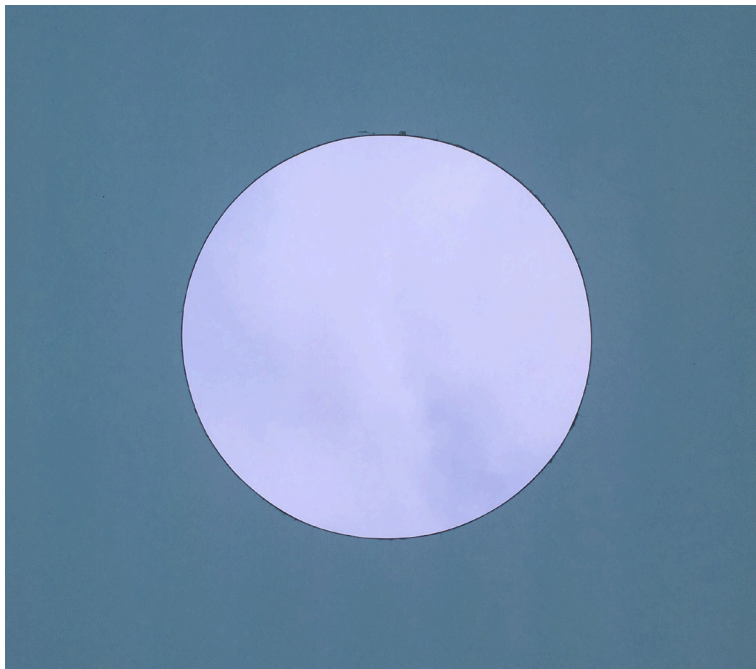
Turrell's Skyspace in Järna, built in 2011, following Swedish traditions using
materials from the neighbourhood.

I haven't heard his name and didn't know what to expect, when
I was picked up from school and brought to a round, black,
wooden tower in the forest in Järna, Sweden.

As simple as you can imagine: Stone benches along the round
room, a stone floor, white walls, and a circle in the ceiling. Wool
blankets because it was late autumn.

It started getting dark when we arrived and spent the next 100 minutes laying on the benches, watching the round hole in the ceiling. Indirect, colored light on the wall slowly changed its nuances, while the sky did the same. I rarely experienced something so simple, slow, and simultaneously so exciting and beautiful. Extremely spectacular in the most silent way.

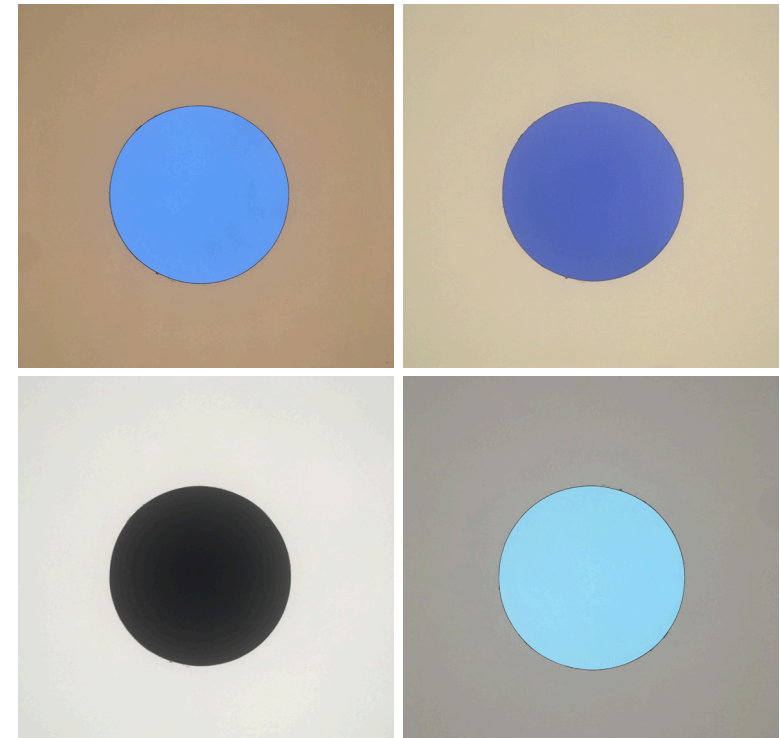
All I could do is laying and observing, my brain was entirely shut off. The experience was intense and still impressing when thinking back. It is kind of difficult to explain, what actually impressed me, beside the color intensity, unexpected variation and shift between fore- and background.



Momentshots during sunset. Passing clouds or birds reminded that the three-dimensional ball is actually the sky.

I guess the main factor for my excitement was that I entirely forgot my surrounding. I am usually constantly thinking and not rarely several line of thoughts simultaneously. Being in this installation erased all thoughts, feelings for temperature or my own body. I just existed, enjoyed, and felt very clean and tidy afterwards. I had a hard time talking and finding back to thinking. I have no better word than *Enlightenment*.

James Turrell (1943) has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in art and in my perception he is a genius in combining these two disciplines.



“My work is more about your seeing than it is about my seeing, although it is a product of my seeing. I’m also interested in the sense of presence of space; that is space where you feel a presence, almost an entity — that physical feeling and power that space can give.”⁷

Turrell considers the sky as his studio and often cites the Parable of Plato’s Cave to introduce the notion “that we are living in a reality of our own creation, subject to our human sensory limitations as well as contextual and cultural norms.”⁷

Turrell’s architectonical installations are simple and interact with the sight and room. His primary medium is pure light.

“My work has no object, no image and no focus. With no object, no image and no focus, what are you looking at? You are looking at you looking. What is important to me is to create an experience of wordless thought.”⁷

Rebecca Horn and the alchemical vocabulary

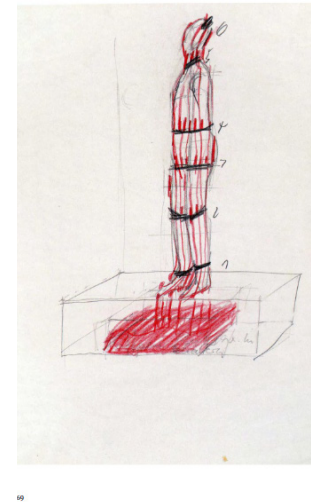
The first time I got in touch with the artistic practice of Rebecca Horn (1944) was in Art history in school. I can't remember what we talked about, since I couldn't connect to her work. But I remember how fascinated I was from the aesthetic beauty and fragility of her small machines, the use of feathers and delicate metal elements. And I remember the series of Body Extensions, which—in my perception—extended and limited the human body at the same time and made me feel really uncomfortable in my own body.



Parrot circle, 2011

Then her name appeared again during my Master research in the book *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*. The authors' intention is to “examine the manner in which artists have employed the alchemical discourse in the promotion of radical, liberal, or even

leftist, political convictions.” They state that “in fact, the esoteric artists of the past century have never been concerned with the alchemical discourse for its own sake. They were not ‘magicians’ as such, rather they discovered in alchemy an expedient strategy facilitating their own political program.”⁸ In this context, Rebecca Horn is mentioned along with Leonora Carrington (1917) and Remedios Varo (1908-1963) as the most significant names of women who “produced alternative esoteric texts to those of the male artists in which they demanded that notice be taken of women’s own aspirations and desires.”⁸



Overflowing Blood Machine, Object, Potography and sketch, 1970

“The German alchemical tradition has provided Rebecca Horn with critical tools for analyzing the causes of sexual conflict. [...] Horn has used the readily recognizable vocabulary of filters, distillation equipment, the four elements, the chemicals of Mercury, Sulphur, red and black powders, as well as the sexual imagery of eggs and sperm. Her theme is that of sexual conflict. In her work any attempt to harmonize the dualistic opposition of masculine and feminine desire is doomed to fail.”⁹ Rebecca Horn is best known for her installation art, performances and film making.

“The objects used and specially made for her installations [...] build the elements for kinetic sculptures that are liberated from their defined materiality and continuously transposed into ever-changing metaphors touching on mythical, historical, literary and spiritual imagery.”¹⁰

The content of our practices differ, but we use a similar vocabulary, which is dominated by alchemical symbolism. When I look at Horns practice now, I can connect to it, read, and sympathize with it. I admire the strength and vulnerability.

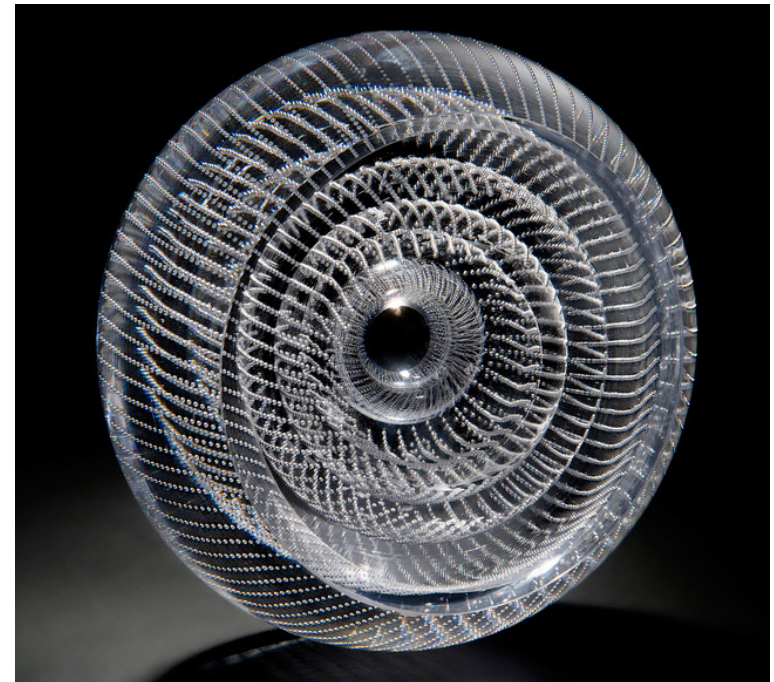
The shared language offers access. What was an intuitional reaction of attraction und uncomfortable feeling in the beginning, developed into an additional intellectual understanding by just observing. A consequence is the question, how my work is perceived, when the vocabulary is unknown, and to a curiosity about how an audience reacts when seeing the objects with innocent eyes instead.



Die sanfte Gefangene, 1978

Shelley James and art as a gate to scientific phenomenon

The first channel through which I got in touch with the practice of Shelley James was her voice. In an interview in Grant Gibson's podcast Material Matters, she speaks about her background, practice, and glass, which is the material she is working with. Gibson introduces her with saying that she “Her work is often inspired by the projects she is undertaking with some of the leading mathematicians and physicists. [...] She is making the unseeing seen”.¹¹



Matrix 1 by Shelley James, blown by James Devereux and Simon Moore

Her voice was the gate to her work because the way she uses it to describe her practice is so filled with humor, excitement, and vibrant fascination. This positivity is interesting when listening to her story. She developed a fascination for the human's visual system because she had to retrain her own visual system, while she was affected and recovering from a brain injury.

She describes glass as an interesting material for artistic-scientific objects, because it offers access to literal and metaphorical spaces. She explains that the brain didn't evolve in a world in which glass existed, so that something transparent and jet solid is confusing and compelling.

In her twitter-account, she describes her professional self as *Lighting consult specialist in neurology and psychology, passionate about power of light to shape our world and impact of artificial light on growing brain.*¹²

While listening to her conversation with Grant Gibson, I was amazed by how her way through a disease ended up in fascination and curiosity for its origins and consequences. Built upon this very personal connection, she reviews, processes, and creates access of scientific phenomenon to a wider audience through art. I see a lot of beauty and honesty and sense in this interdisciplinary collaboration.



"This piece grew out of a Residency in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at King's College, London in 2016. It extends my fascination with five-fold symmetry and research into a new generation of molecular structures that respond to light."¹³

¹ KUNSTFORUM International, *Staunen*, 2019, p 66, transl.

² KUNSTFORUM International, *Staunen*, 2019, p 67, transl.

³ KUNSTFORUM International, *Staunen*, 2019, p 50, transl.

⁴ Catalogue to *Move little hands...* "Move!", 2019, p 13

⁵ Švankmajer, Jan, Eva. *Decalogue*. Source: Catalogue to *Move little hands...* "Move!", 2019, catalogue, p 35-37

⁶ <https://www.skyspace.se/>

⁷ <https://jamesturrell.com/about/introduction/>

⁸ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 3

⁹ Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, 2011, p 101

¹⁰ <https://www.rebecca-horn.de/pages-en/biography.html>

¹¹ <https://open.spotify.com/episode/44TfoPQ6BiQlTmRgSmnwwB?si=No6tTx15SBeI11k1Uyfw3Q>

¹² <https://twitter.com/shelleyjglass?lang=en>

¹³ <http://london-light.org/featured-artist-shelley-james/>

INDEX

LAPIS PHILOSOPHORUMS

During this project, I constantly and increasingly observed myself and looked for situations, in which I lost all thoughts about my alchemical processes and paused from thoughts about work, approach, striving and development. The created objects are based on these situations and interpreted or materialized in Objects N°1-6 when their supportive benefit was confirmed in the interviews.

I believe that an active impact from the object onto the user happens, when the audience perceives value in a confrontation and therefore tried to create objects, which speak about themselves through the function or benefit, they offer.

Making and creating things from value is something I assume as one intended core characteristic of craft processes. But who generates value? Value and worth are two different entities and objectively—probably—impossible to measure. Who is it that creates value: The maker, the object, the audience?

The author of the book *Designing Things* puts the question if value is a quality of the object or the subject”.¹ The sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918) takes a clear position by stating that “Value is never a quality of the object but a judgement upon them which remains inherent in the subject” and characterizes value as something “attributed to the objects of subjective desire”. So, by releasing these objects, I oppose them to your judgement and the generation of value is lost from my grip.

To answer the question, how a vessel could communicate as a container for stories and gestures, it would be necessary to use a universal narrative, which to create is difficult to impossible in many ways. Objects N°1-6 are trials from different levels of abstraction and connotation. They are all filled with personal and cultural fragments.

Therefore, I want to share background information about these items, their origin and choice of material. On the following pages, I will tell stories about single fragments as well as the connecting threads, in the hope that one day there is no need for this anymore and that they grip anyway.

Feeding cups

Insulator

Sitting on warm stones

Tile stove

Moomin plate

Onsen

Liquid gold

Copper

INFANT FEEDING CUPS

A short introduction of the model and inspiration of *Object N°1*.

Small and delicate, these cups for feeding infants span continents and millennia. Along with Japanese and Roman examples is an earthenware cup from ancient Sudan, which was buried in a grave next to twin children. This simple vessel is a 3,000-year-old expression of care and nourishment in death, as well as in life.⁴

I visited the V&A Museum of Childhood and the Wellcome Collection in London and discovered in both museums these tiny treasures that spoke to me immediately.

The delicate Infant Feeding Cups amazed me in their use and appearance. The gesture of feeding as one core action of caring-through all ages and relations. The beauty and attention in the manufactured object. So mature and precious that it is not necessarily obvious if their beauty is created for the person fed, the person feeding, to honor the tradition, culture, or craft.

In my perception, these vessels celebrate and embody love and attention in various emotional ways and during their production, it was very important to call these objects feeding cups and I corrected when someone called them saucer or pot. What these simple vessels embody is superior to their function.



Japan, ca 1800 & Sudan, Neolithic, 1000-400 BCE
 Wellcome Collection, London

INSULATOR

A description of the original of *Object N°3*.

Functional objects have a very attractive aesthetic to me. My designs have always followed the “form follows function”-thought. I love when objects are clear and honest, reduced to their purpose and transparent in their construction and function.

It gets interesting when these functional items are removed from their context and through that separated from fulfilling their purpose. What remains is a shape that probably lost any sense. Sometimes we still see what they were designed for. Sometimes not.

I found this object in a river and thought: What a crazy egg! Very soon, it was obvious that it was not an egg, but a man-made item, supposed to.... yeah, to what? It is heavy, it is unhandy, it is not necessarily beautiful to the common customer. Since I saw them often in the sky, I knew on the second view that this item is an insulator, produced to tighten metal wires and prevent the energy from following the wrong way. A very important job and for me, like jewelry in the sky.



Electric cables in Arita, Japan

When thinking about this insulator, I am thinking about the strength of energy. How destructive it can be, how dangerous, at the same time as it is important and essential. In our central European urban environment, electricity floats invisible. This insulator became a symbol. It speaks about the control of energy, about that is important to control it and the question, if that is always possible, visible, and good.



An insulator in its natural habitat. Arita, Japan

SITTING ON WARM STONES AND HAVING THE HAND IN THE SEA.

An explanation of situations and materiality, appearing in *Objects N°4-6*.

This material is the most personal element in the objects. The clay from Åland appears processed in variations of color, treatment, and position.

And this is the environment, where I took it from. The personal connection decides on the materials value and cannot be universalized, as I noticed. But the location with its characteristics is from the same importance and the experience probably something that can ground from empathy.



Myself in the environment, in which I am as far away from (alchemical) approaches, as I can. Björkö, Åland Islands, Finland

Sitting on warm stones and facing the ocean—a feeling that makes me both aware of my very physical existence and impudence towards the strength of nature. Two aspects that relax me deeply in that small issues become very pointless for some time. The storage of heat as an almost supernatural phenomenon. To feel the warmth in the rocks, even hours after the sun disappeared, spends a feeling of magical security.

As well as having the hand in the ocean. The combination of kinetic feedback sounds through own actions, a contrasting temperature to the one of the body and a mass which is in its scale simply overwhelming: feeling very powerful and very tiny at the same time.

The sea is rough and cold but bathing in it is wonderful anyway. The water is very salty and the smell on the skin incomparable. It is another washing and cleaning oneself. It is more like a cleaning from civilization, norms, and standards.

I still do what I did when I was young: covering my skin with the mud and the little stones and algae it contains, let it dry in the sun to then scrub it off and feel like getting a new, healthier, and stronger skin. I guess we all have our cleaning rituals, which are a combination of tradition, resulting from positive experiences and good advertisements. But even so the rituals differ, the result of feeling washed remains the same.



My mom, bathing. The water is too fertile to be considered as clean. After bathing in it, you can smell salt and shells on your skin. Björkö, Åland Islands, Finland

TILE STOVE

An introduction into the model for *Object N°5*.

A tile stove to-go is a paradox. A tile stove is the heart of a house; it gathers the people living in it and spends warmth, energy. The tricky thing about a tile stove is, that you need a house first. Then the stove can be constructed and adjusted to the environment it is supposed to heat.

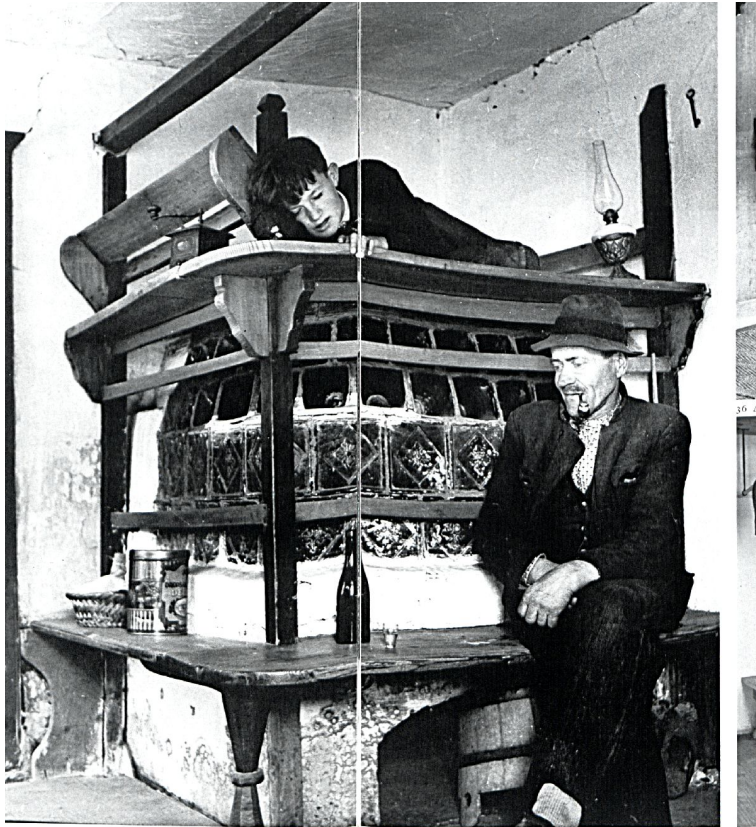
Building a stove is a decision.

Building a stove is a true craft and follows a long tradition.

One special character of a tile stove is that it does not have an open fire. This type of stove is not constructed in a multipurpose way; it is for heating only. Due to its construction, heating happens in a very sustainable way since the heat is stored and released through a long period of time. Stoves and ovens have a very long history, tile-stoves in specific started to appear quite late in the 14th century in the alpine region⁵. The fire happens inside the stove and the heat is lead through an extended corridor. Various types of these inner constructions exist, and it depends on the size of the house or room, the preferred speed and duration of heat that influences the decision.

The case is thick and can consist of various ceramic materials, as chamotte, loam or clay.⁶ The visual appearance varies from simple to highly decorated since these types of stove could and still can be found in every type of living conditions. The outer tiles are flat or bowl shaped, and impact the heating efficiency.⁷

I will not dive into details of construction and history; I more want to put focus on the emotional and aesthetical strength of these functional objects and this picture hit the core for me. The stove is simple but beautifully made, cased in a construction that allows the feel of warmth as immediate as possible. It is the spot for survival in a very fundamental and social way.

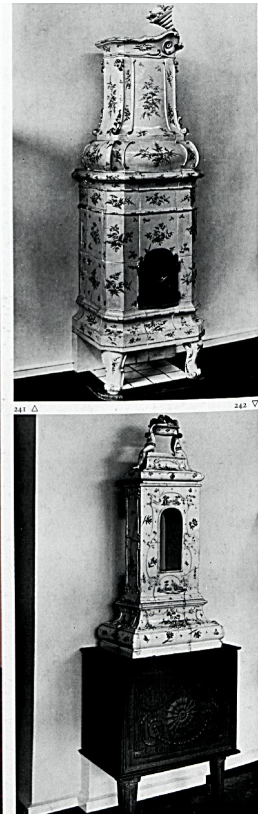


Kitchen situation, around 1930, Südtirol (p65 (scan))

The next examples are from a more decorative and representative quality. The social aspect changed, in that they don't allow to sit on or be close to them. Instead, they form a strong presence in a room and brought into focus through their highly decorated visual appearance. During my research, I mainly found examples, whose only visual purpose is to be beautiful: Floral motives, scenes from fairytales or whitewashed domestic scenes, speaking about coziness, family life and care.



German tile stoves from the late 18th century (p148 (scan))



It is not an uncommon decision that nowadays, the home consists of a couple of boxes that change apartment, city, country in a three-year rhythm. Striving, developing, and moving onwards affects the lifestyle deeply. One consequence is, that it is not possible to build a tile stove. For time and space reasons.

Moomin Plate

Information about the carved pattern in *Object N°5*.

“When someone invests psychic energy in an object—a thing, another person, an idea—that object becomes charged with the energy of the agent. [...] Part of the person’s life has been transferred to the focal object.”² Psychic energy can be invested in various ways. When making an object, as well as deciding for one and going into any kind of interaction with it.

For this agent, the energy is now “lost” since it landed in the object. This process turns the object into a materialization of a goal² and is therefore connected to expectations.

This is a picture from my very first plate and it is highly charged in and through every step of its development.



In 1990-1994 Arabia produced children’s tableware sets with a wreath designed by Tove Jansson. Arabia’s ceramic illustrator Tove Slotte modified the original picture for the plate and chose the coloring for the design.³

It became a symbol through time. Not because it is my first plate, but for how I treated it. I kept it in a box. Flatmates can be a danger for emotional objects. Plates break and it is ok with other plates, but not with that one. I knew I would take it out from the box and back into the kitchen board as soon I found an environment I can trust. I hated this habit, which made the plate become something else than a utensil. I took it away from its natural environment: kitchen and table.

Always having it with me caused mixed feelings and it became a symbol for secret comfort and an inconvenient lifestyle.

When I talked about this plate, which I did a lot during my previous studies of porcelain design, I talked about the fear of using the things we love with the consequence of not using them. I talked about the only professional future vision I had, which was that I never wanted to make Moomin plates.

The longer I stored it, the more important it became, and paradoxically did I increase my reluctance towards tableware and other utensils, which spend their existence separated from their original purpose. And the longer I stored it, the pickier I became to take it out.

This plate became so charged with the future vision of what I want to have and what I never want to make, that I was almost of relieved when it happened.



Well.... What can you do when your flatmate breaks your most precious childhood plate? Just a few weeks after you were finally brave enough to take it out from the box. And it was not even a place I considered as home. It was a place in which I needed some home-feeling and comfort so strongly. You can write about it, carry on the story, look at the shard and make use of the gained knowledge. What is the shard now? *A lot*, is my answer. It became a personal manifesto and increased in meaning to me. The shard is hanging on my wall now and I can finally accept it as an emotional but dysfunctional object. Finally. It was never about the plate. Of course it was not. It is quite clear what it was and is about: Carrying a piece of home to every destination. Having it in a box until I hoped to trust a place, but mainly to decide for a place. The action of taking it from the box would be the honor for a flat to be called home. I noticed how important the comfort of this safe-space is, that it is the result of a decision and requires effort to make it warm and emotionally secure. The shard reminds me, that decisions have to be taken and that they can happen physically and mentally.

ONSEN BATH

A short introduction into the inspiration of *Object N°6*.

“In Japan, an Onsen is defined as hot water, mineral water, water vapor and other gas [...] gushing out from the ground and having the temperatures or substances listed below by a law named the *Hot Springs Act*.

Temperature : When collected from Onsen source >25°C

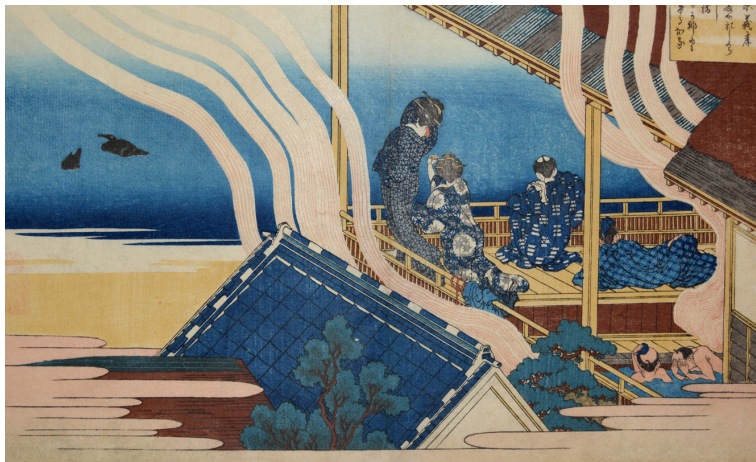
Gases:

Free carbon_dioxide (CO ₂)	over 150mg
Lithium_ion (Li ⁺)	over 1mg
Strontium_ion Sr ²	over 10mg
Barium-ion (Ba ⁺)	over 5mg
Ferro or ferri_ion (Fe ² Fe ³)	over 10mg
First manganese_ion (Mn ²)	over 10mg
Hydrogen_ion (H ⁺)	over 1mg
Bromine_ion (Br ⁻)	over 5mg
Iodine_ion (I ⁻)	over 1mg
Fluoride_ion (F ⁻)	over 2mg
Hydro Arsenate_ion (HAsO ₄ ²⁻)	over 1.3mg
Meta Arsenous_acid (HAsO ₂)	over 1mg
Total sulfur (S)	over 1mg
Metabolic_acid (HBO ₂)	over 5mg
Metasilicic_acid (H ₂ SiO ₃)	over 50mg
Bicarbonate_soda (NaHCO ₃)	over 340mg
Radon (Rn)	over 20 (unit: ten ppb curie)
Radium salt (as Ra)	over 100 million mg

Therefore, when the temperature reaches 25 degrees Celsius or more, it is regarded as an Onsen, and when it contains a specified amount of the substances (one or more of these 19 compounds) even when the temperature is less than 25 degrees Celsius, it is regarded as an Onsen at the same time. And as long as such conditions are met, water vapor or gas can be an Onsen as well.”⁸

Basically, an Onsen is a hot spring and measured by scientific premises. Practically and personally, the act of bathing in a Japanese Onsen is the most beautiful and self-celebrative way of cleaning, I ever experienced.

Visiting an Onsen is connected to specific rules and choreographies: Gender-separated and entirely naked, you enter the bath. But before you enter the actual bath, you clean yourself generously. Sitting or kneeling under a private shower in a public room, usually facing a wall or window, you soap and wash yourself. I saw women washing their teeth and shaving their legs. Completely clean, you enter the pool, which is whether inside or outside, in a clean or highly decorated environment, sometimes smelly, and always extremely warm. The smell comes from the nutrients. Depending where you are, the water feels light or heavy, oily or almost sparkling. After leaving the water, you can shower again if you want to, but never with soap. The nutrients are good for your skin and soul and need time to be absorbed by the body.



This Japanese woodblock print shows a bathing house, not obviously if the view shows the sky and birds or the ocean and islands. The air is filled with the hot steam.

And not just the body. It is possible to buy Onsen Water in supermarkets, used for low temperature cooking or steaming. Some Onsen baths are connected to a restaurant, using the water from the same spring. Visiting an Onsen is in Japan—especially in the South, where many natural hot springs can be found—integrated into regular life. In earlier days, public Onsens replaced private bathrooms and were visited once or twice a week. The entrance price is usually very cheap and therefore accessible for persons from every social and economic background.

MINI BAR

A view on the liquids, served in *Object N°6*.

Everybody has own ingredients for inner and outer health. What we inhale, swallow, put on our skin is what we think is good for it and for us and helps us feeling renewed. We only want the best for our bodies and souls, don't we? The Mini-Bar is filled with personal interpretations of (digestible) gold.

Alcohol. Sadly, but not surprisingly, one of the repeating answers to the question, how people pause from the distractions of regular life. Anti-septic and more.

Copper. See next page.

Egg yolk. Considered as a pure source of proteins. Golden in color and creamy in consistency. An egg is a thing, in which life grows. Or thoughts. Or the Philosopher's Stone itself.

Honey. Liquid gold, which is for me highly charged through Beuys' comparison of its moveable and flexible consistency in a warm environment to a healthy human mind. Additionally, is the taste of honey one I connect to comfort and calmness.

Porcelain slip. White gold. Having a porcelain-skin is what was, and partly is, still perceived as pure beauty.

Saffron. The most expensive spice. Tiny, fragile, thin, almost weightless but nevertheless so strong in color and taste. Especially when lying in strong alcohol.

Salt. An innocent mineral with its very own story and history, while being the most basic spice in all food culture I am familiar with. You notice immediately when it is missing, while too much of it can become really dangerous.

Vinegar. The center of my body is the center of my physical well-feeling. A shot of vinegar has always helped, and I really trust this liquid.

Vitamin-D in olive oil. Liquid sun, which brought me through the Swedish winter with more energy than I had expected.

Copper

A reflection on the element and mineral, appearing in *Ikarus Collection*, *Sunrise and sunset to plug in*, in *Object N°6*, and all the cables and the below shown insulator.

29 | Cu | Copper

Atomic Weight 63.546 Density 8.920 Atomic Radius 145pm

“ [...] Is wonderful stuff. Just wonderful. Many elements have some kind of gotcha about them. [...] Copper has no gotcha—it is just nice stuff all around.”⁹

From a chemical and objective perspective is copper actually “better” than gold, when it comes to its characteristics. However, did the alchemists want gold and used copper as the main ingredient. Copper is a metal, which leads energy.



¹ Boradkar, *Designing Things*, p45

² Csikszentmihalyi, Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, p8

³ <https://www.moomin.com/en/blog/wreaths-by-tove-jansson/#8b9d6664>

⁴ Display text, Wellcome Collection, London, UK

⁵ Gebhart, Torsten *Kachelöfen Mittelpunkt des häuslichen Lebens*, p10

⁶ Gebhart, Torsten *Kachelöfen Mittelpunkt des häuslichen Lebens*, p14

⁷ Gebhart, Torsten *Kachelöfen Mittelpunkt des häuslichen Lebens*, p21

⁸ <https://www.spa.or.jp/en/onsen/>

⁹ Gray, Mann, *The Elements*, p 134

BIRDS AFTER AIR PUMPS

Some curiosities need the reality check to be proved.

An Experiment on a bird in an air pump by Joseph Wright of Derby shows a situation of beauty and cruelty. Well, actually not cruelty. Not yet.

The persons being present during this experiment demonstrate various behaviors. From relaxed to concentrated to curious to eager to afraid. The faces and their emotions are so present, that the bird is seen only on the second view.

We as observer from the viewpoint of the 21st-century are probably prepared about what to expect when the air pump gets started. The reason why I am so attracted and fascinated by this captured situation is the imagery of the faces after our expectations of this experiment get fulfilled.

I received the picture as a reference, long time after starting at Konstfack and not connected to my first works, but to the desire of experimentation, gaining knowledge and stepping forward. But when I saw this picture, I had to think back and it made me keeping and integrating my first trials.



An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump, Joseph Wright of Derby,
1768, Oil on canvas, 1.83 m x 2.44 m, National Gallery, London



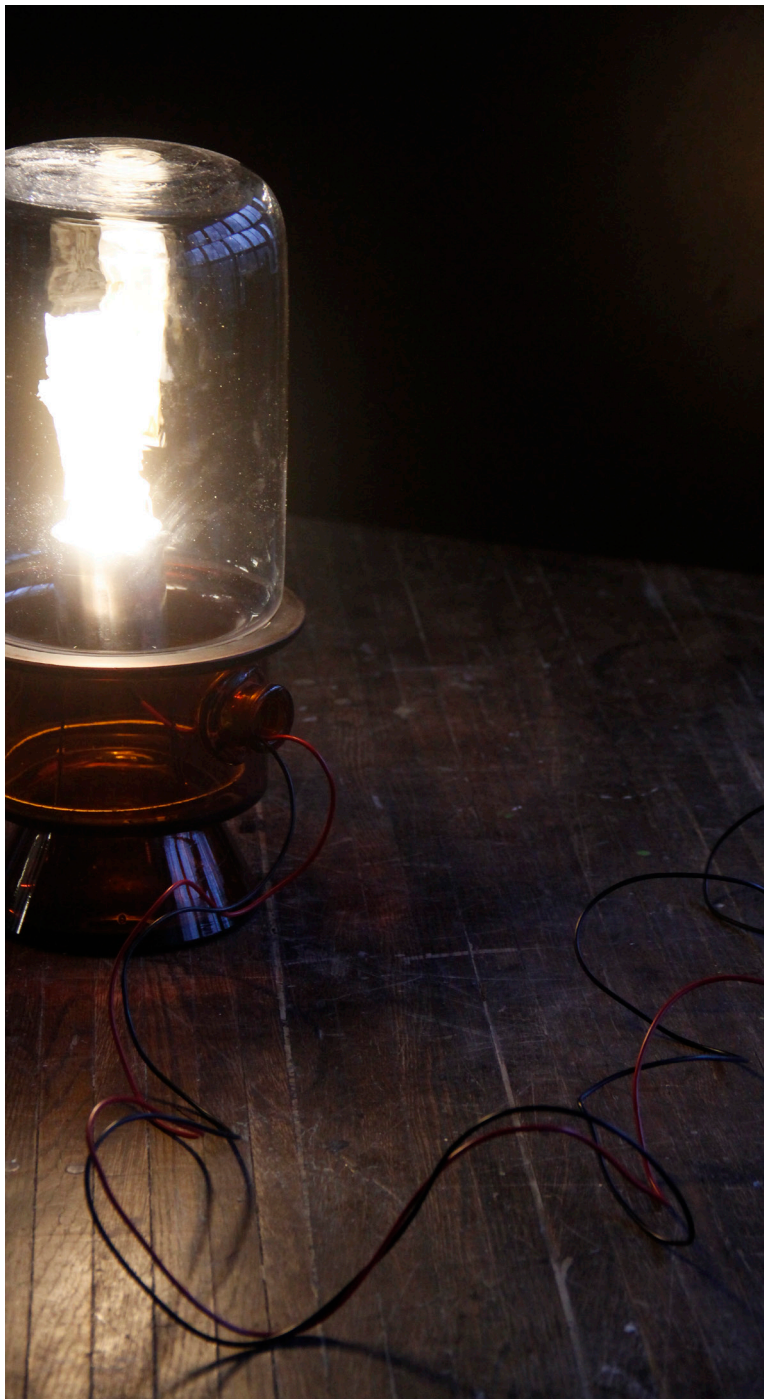
Following one first research question How much light can I see through processed rocks, I produced paper-thin objects in porcelian and stoneware slip.



The structure appears through layering the leatherhard slip and glaze, shaving thin pieces and applying those to a ceramic body.







I like to call myself a storyteller

because this is what I aim to be and love to do. Telling stories. Through different media and levels of abstraction. My primary material is porcelain, which I enrich with spoken and written words, photography, created contexts and sceneries. All my stories are collected through experience. Most of them from cultural contexts far away from the one I grew up in. All of them from a quality I perceive as beneficial to master hurdles in every day life.

I save them in my memories and sketchbooks for a later activation. Transformed through my hands, those stories become objects of function. Literally and metaphorically, without hierarchies between case and content.

My goals: Materialization of gestures and activation of symbols.
My intentions: Deceleration, celebration, and vigilance.
My tools: Poetry, curiosity, wondering, sensuality.

All this is what I expect from my works and practice when I make it. Porcelain in all its aesthetics, consistencies, characters, and symbolisms, is the bubble in which I both lose and find myself.

My visual language is silent, pure in color and shape, but never simple. Every detail and material choice are a consequence from a line of thoughts. The details are small, but they are there to be discovered with eyes, hands and without distance.

