



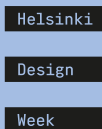
23

CONTEMPORARY DESIGN  
GRADUATION SHOW

# AALTO UNIVERSITY MASTER'S IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

The Contemporary Design programme focuses on material research and sustainable solutions. Studies are context-driven and encourage students to expand their thinking beyond established processes, merging traditional crafts with an experimental design mindset. The teaching methods emphasise the creative process, with results ranging from pure art to functional objects.

Aalto University is ranked 6th in the world in the field of art and design by QS World University Ranking. It was established as a merger of three major Finnish universities in the fields of science, business, and the arts, with the core mission to foster multidisciplinary education and research.



## THE MAKING OF ARTEFAKTI

The Contemporary Design Programme (CoDe) at Aalto University is relatively young. The university itself was created just over a decade ago in 2010 when three separate institutions amalgamated, bridging expertise in design, engineering and business. After some rounds of iteration, the CoDe programme in its current form launched in 2018.

Established design Masters' at other schools feature annual graduation showcases in which participation is as much a rite of passage as a cap and gown, but until now the nascent CoDe programme has not produced any formal group exhibition for outgoing students. While our graduates chalk up majorly impressive successes in their own right – launching award-winning startups and exhibiting at major fairs like Salone del Mobile Milano, Dutch Design Week, London Design Biennale, and Habitare – we lack a collective footprint. Our classmates are Finnish and from farther away: this first iteration of the exhibition also features talents from Mexico, Colombia, Italy, Spain, Japan, Canada, and the USA. Our goal with ARTEFAKTI is to showcase the broad-spanning creative outcomes of this programme and, more importantly, to highlight the unique stories of the individual designers emerging from the Master's. As such, ARTEFAKTI has no overarching theme; rather, we have asked each graduate to write their own Designer Narrative, outlining their personal approach to contemporary design and tracing their path to and through their practice.

CoDe emphasises lateral collaboration and self-initiative, as seen in the open briefs of its core courses. Sometimes as little as one word or concept (“soil”, “origins”, “The Baltic Sea”) is the prism through which an expansive array of projects takes shape. In the same spirit, when we approached the CoDe faculty to propose an annual graduation exhibition, they encouraged us to take the lead and create a show from our perspective as students. With the support of Aalto University's Department of Design, our vision is realised in this first edition of ARTEFAKTI. Anticipating the evolution of the show, we have partnered with Helsinki Design Week for the next three years, starting with this inaugural graduation show. The name references a common thread in CoDe's output, where students produce artefacts of different orders – be they material, digital, conceptual, collaborative, or otherwise – as an inquiry into the role of design objects in society.

Producing this exhibition series has been a labour of love: it is at once an offering to our now-graduating classmates, a contribution to incoming student cohorts who will participate in subsequent editions, a platform for connecting with industry partners who will visit us in person at Merikortteli or via our digital archive, and a salute to the incoming collaborations and colleagues we have yet to meet. More broadly, ARTEFAKTI is designed with the future of the Contemporary Design programme in mind, its reputation and reach both at home and abroad. Finland may be slightly farther than other design capitals geographically (consequently, there is an encouraging air of deliberateness from classmates who venture from abroad) but this is a place steeped in the tradition of design. As students of the Master's Programme in Contemporary Design, we are living in a place that is historically visionary, that values cultures of craft and quality, and where our ties to nature are not simply aesthetic or theoretical but grounded in the landscapes we inhabit daily. We are looking to the future while firmly planted in the present.

Thank you for stopping by.

Zoë Robertson

on behalf of the ARTEFAKTI production team  
(Etienne Thevenet, Juan Guevara Verjel and myself)

# CONTEMPORARY DESIGN IN CONTEXT

An interview with the Faculty of Aalto University's  
Master's in Contemporary Design



The **ARTEFAKTI** Team sits down with the faculty of Aalto University's Master's in Contemporary Design to discuss the origins of the programme, students' expansive outcomes, and the common values that underscore its teachings. We also talk about how we interpret contemporary design and the way it factors into the wider field of design.

It is late August and we meet in Professor Julia Lohmann's garden on a leafy residential island off Helsinki. There is tea and plum cake and part way through our conversation, when the mist turns to a drizzle, Julia materialises an impressive assortment of broad-brimmed hats. We chat in motley headgear beside a tall rock face and lush summer greens, occasionally patting the dog Captain who navigates underfoot.

Thank you to Julia Lohmann for hosting our conversation, to Ena Naito for helping to transcribe this interview. Introduction and editing for brevity and clarity by Zoë Robertson.

## ARTEFAKTI

Juan Guevara Verjel  
and Zoë Robertson

## ANNA VAN DER LEI

Lecturer

## JULIA LOHMANN

Professor of Practice

## KIRSTI TAINIOLA

Lecturer, Glass

## NATHALIE LAUTENBACHER

Lecturer, Ceramics

## SIMO PUINTILA

Lecturer, Industrial and Product design

**ARTEFAKTI:** Let's start off with talking about the history and evolution of the programme. It used to be billed as 'Product and Spatial Design'. What was the motivation for creating the Contemporary Design programme in the form it is now?

**NATHALIE:** It used to be Applied Arts and Crafts, with jewellery design as one specialisation. There was a Master's separating ceramics and glass and that was put together. So it's a mixture of applied arts under industrial design, and ceramics and glass. But if we think of your question, the drivers for the programme, it was really the organisational defragmentation of things. I remember this word was used all the time. We have to 'defragment,' but at the same time try to keep one part as artistic work and crafts.

**KIRSTI:** But I think it was also partly because in the olden days, the students had to choose a material. You are going to be a textile person, or a ceramic and glass person.

**JULIA:** I guess the idea of Aalto University was to take away the barriers so that people could move more freely or use different materials for projects.

**NATHALIE:** I think when we started our studies, for example, I chose ceramics at the age of 18. I decided that was where I wanted to focus and in a way it's quite crazy to think about it now. Making those decisions

at that time. Now we are provided a broader palette of materials and techniques and ways of making. You choose throughout your studies. But on the other hand, the students have a shorter time for their studies and the choice is sometimes difficult to make. For some, for those who are really sure of what they do, it's quite easy to start and concentrate on one throughout their studies. But when you choose several it can be that the multitude of choices can be daunting. [It's drizzling and Julia brings out a pile of different hats for everyone to cover from the rain.] Oh, you have hats.

**SIMO:** Previously, the Department of Industrial Design was funding the metal workshop and the jewellery workshop and because of that the pedagogical content was organised under them. Furniture design was funding the wood workshop. So, these different disciplines were not really collaborating too much.

**NATHALIE:** That has really been a great change, that everything – all studios – are open for all, and they are collaborating really well.

**SIMO:** You think about Applied Art and Design, and how narrow it was 25 years ago, and how it has now expanded into really interesting directions and merged with ceramics and a bit of product design, experimental approaches, and material research.

**ARTEFAKTI:** What does the term 'contemporary design' mean to each of you? How do you understand it? You said the choice of the programme's name was guided by administrative motivations, but there's also something appealing about the name.

**JULIA:** For me, contemporary design means to actually – at a moment of great upheaval and change – reflect on what we cannot lose and what we should gain and how we should redirect our practices. Quite often what we find is that materiality as such is not considered important anymore. You know, there's a lot of immaterial stuff, but we think that this proximity to materiality, to the tangible, is also a connection – for us to be part of nature rather than apart from it. So it's about these experiences,

and about all of this cultural knowledge that we've gained over thousands of years that we cannot afford to lose. But at the same time, we know that our material streams are really destructive and that we have to redirect quickly and that we need to consider how we do this without throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I think of contemporary design as really being at the cusp of that change. And what is being researched and how it affects this and whether the questions of last year are still valid or whether we need to pose new questions and whether we can find questions

**“I think that design education also helps us to understand the world we are living in. Why things are the way they are, the physical world and the material world and what kind of things are connected to it.”**

or answers that might be open. Maybe we just find a good question, and that's already quite a step forward.

**NATHALIE:** I think you answered very well for me too. I mean, in these times, in really digital times, contemporary design is about being able to have a combination and a balance between digitality and the material world. I feel that teaching ceramics is wanting to keep the connection to the past and all that we have learned in the history of design and living in this environment that is the cultural. Cultural values are also very important to keep in mind, and hands-on working and studio work is really essential for so many people to be able to express and feel with their hands and even becoming designers in a digital world, I find it really important. I think we are doing that. We are working for that in the department.

**KIRSTI:** I think that design education also helps us to understand the world we are living in. Why things are the way they are, the physical world and the material world

and what kind of things are connected to it. We can learn about material qualities and structures and production, and we can also pose questions about how it could be in the future. How can we influence change? Which is quite crucial at the moment.

**ANNA:** What we hope is that the contemporary design programme also allows different voices to frame their own practice and are really looking to different areas of interest.

**SIMO:** It's kind of an attitude, in a way. Like being curious about new things, being experimental, progressive, trying to come up with something that has not been done yet, and these kinds of things. I don't want to compare it to other Majors, but somehow there is this kind of artistic component that's also strongly present. And not only providing that kind of artistic content, but also that different kind of attitude or approach to our environment and whatever we are dealing with.

**ARTEFAKTI:** It's interesting to think of Contemporary Design as having a different kind of approach. How do we see that in the programme? What is our point of reference?

**JULIA:** I think it can mean, for example, not setting one concrete brief but actually allowing for people to develop their own briefs within a certain structure or a given frame. We're expecting students to actually formulate their own ideas. So, quite often in the early projects we have this experience that the students are waiting for us to give a brief and then it takes quite a while because we say, 'No, there is no brief. You write your brief.' And then there's always this moment of transition like, 'Oh, okay. I'm supposed to fill that void somehow.' But I think this is intentional. I mean, it can be smoother in a way to actually help them realise what's expected. But I think in a lot of the courses there is ample freedom for how you want to frame it. Maybe more than in other Masters'.

**SIMO:** Yeah. And I think that's definitely a better critical kind of decision. Because

**“...And it's not necessarily for making art, but rather to have a vision of yourself. We're trying to help students to find their own way to be creative.”**

even though – well, my background is in industrial design and I kind of hope that at least some of the students will continue to develop their career as an industrial designer as well – I still think this experience of filling the void with your own personal kind of thinking is a huge asset for you as a designer. Even if you're working as an industrial designer or a product designer or whatever, when you have that kind of experience, you can really ask yourself: where do you struggle? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? Then you become a lot stronger as a designer or artist or whatever your role will be.

**NATHALIE:** I think the artistic component you mentioned is really important. And it's not necessarily for making art, but rather to have a vision of yourself. We're trying to help students to find their own way to be creative.

**ARTEFAKTI:** What kind of expectations do you have for Contemporary Design students, at both the stage they are entering and also upon completing the Master's?

**JULIA:** I think coming in, we have the expectation that they have a will to develop their own practice in a way, that they are the type of student who thrives on having a one-word brief or being able to develop their own project somehow. And that they are curious. I think the word 'curiosity' that Simo mentioned is very important. Wanting to expand with every project you're doing, your current frame of what you know, really working at the limit and then also taking risks rather than playing it safe. That's coming in. And coming out of the programme, it's difficult to say because we are hoping that we will have students that we've supported in the direction they want to go, but these directions might be very different for everyone. So some people come in with a very applied set of skills

and want to work more freely, and other people traverse in the other direction. The hope is that we will be able to support people on their pathway and help them actually find their voice, and find their pathway, and find what's right for them. And, be more clear about where their strengths lie.

**NATHALIE:** Find their originality. Yeah.

**ANNA:** Yes. I think a lot of students that come in to study their MA already actually have quite a strong practice. So if we now refer to that group, then what I also hope is that they take these two years to... I don't want to say 'reinvent' themselves, but maybe they could try to fail once. Then again, we have students who know what they want and they just go deeper into the knowledge they already have. We try to cater to both, and many types of hats.

**ARTEFAKTI:** [Indicating the array of straw hats we are wearing.] This is the perfect example.

**SIMO:** You look like a lamp.

**JULIA:** I think you look gorgeous. You look really nice.

**ANNA:** You all look like you're from a fashion magazine.

**NATHALIE:** Can I take a picture?

**SIMO:** Actually something quite interesting would be to track where our graduates actually land. We haven't been doing that. This is a relatively new programme.

**JULIA:** How old is the programme? Five years? It started in 2018.

**NATHALIE:** We follow many of our students after graduation, but we don't have statistics. Many have their independent studios.

**JULIA:** Some work in Marimekko, Fiskars, some in other industries too. The range is really broad.



**ANNA:** But of course a Master's is super short. It's only two years. So the motivation is quite important because it's really important that the students also know that you have only a short period of time, and you need to make choices on what to focus on and what not to.

**ARTEFAKTI:** That reminds me of what you said earlier about students' self-determination, that it's important to foster some kind of agency in students.

**JULIA:** Yeah. I think it comes with that 'contemporary' question, because if you are working on the cusp of what's emerging, quite often when you graduate, there might not yet be a set place for you. There might be the need to actually also invent your position, also find who has a need for what you have to offer.

In a way I think we should be doing more of that, you know, giving the skills to be able to do that. But I think that comes together with being at this forefront. Sometimes there are other places where you wouldn't expect the designer to be employed. For example, some of our students are employed at VTT, which is a research lab. So it's kind of not a classical employer for – you know – it's probably not what they thought of when they started the programme, but something that emerged throughout. And I think telling these stories of where we can insert our skills as designers in unusual places is really important. I think there is a need for design in many situations where there's currently not yet a designer.

**ANNA:** Yeah. So you're at the MA, you are learning to write your own brief, but you're asked to think about your own job and career.

**ARTEFAKTI:** You mentioned traditions and knowhow about how things have been done in the past. How does the programme reflect on and react to contemporary events and social currents? How does that conversation happen?

**JULIA:** That's a really good question. We try, when we

write our courses two years in advance, to write them open enough, to kind of write the frame. But we also try to write them so openly that we can still manoeuvre and bring in topics that come later. But there are other topics where none of us might have the expertise. For example, AI is now a topic where we're thinking, well, we need to actually work with it, figure out what our position is, and how we should deal with it. But none of us have that as our core skill. So we need to figure out who to collaborate with, or how to bring it in and how to connect it. There's always a strategic level where we're thinking, well, what is strategically important? Of course we need to have a skill set to be able to teach it and to engage with it. Either we do that internally or, in situations where we are more flexible, we partner with someone who can bring that knowledge to our courses, for example, a marine researcher?

**ANNA:** Yeah. We are only a small part of the course. Usually we have a lot of experts on board and with the course Materials and Living Systems we've been to a marine research station. So we also need to acknowledge that, if we do not have the knowledge, who should we actually ask?

**JULIA:** And I think one really important point there is that we are actively trying to connect the teaching with the research that goes on in the department. So with geopolymers, we actively try to match the students and connect them to the research projects, or at least somehow connect some of the courses to the research projects or some of the lecturers, so that there is a cross-fertilization from research to teaching and vice-versa.

“Somehow I also feel that we as a department give you the frames, in a way. And it's actually the students who bring the topicality of things.”

**ANNA:** Yeah. And we do hope that when the students leave, they also see collaboration or coworking almost as a must when it comes to some of the projects. That if you are starting a project, you always need to reach out to people who could help you when it comes to gaining knowledge.

“What's the context? Where do I see it? Why am I doing this, who am I doing this for? These are super relevant questions.”

**NATHALIE:** Somehow I also feel that we as a department give you the frames, in a way. And it's actually the students who bring the topicality of things. You are the ones who live in this world, you are in this society, and you bring the phenomena that interest you. And that's really important, that it's not the brief that's thinking of that. We cannot make plans for your future. It's not one-sided.

**SIMO:** From a pedagogical point of view, we have several courses where there are principal techniques or processes that we need to teach. And that's one thing. And then the topic, how you apply that skill, that's something that you as a student basically decide. It's kind of a combination of these topics or phenomenons and issues going on – what's going on in our society or environment – and then on the other hand, these very kind of classical process management skills.

**NATHALIE:** And that can also be questioned and broken.

**ANNA:** It's also really important for you as students to say, you know, I have this amazing project I've been working on, but how do I reach out to society? What's the role of my project? What's the context? Where do I see it? Why am I doing this, who am I doing this for? These are super relevant questions.

**ARTEFAKTI:** Earlier, Anna mentioned Design Academy Eindhoven and Julia, you graduated from the Royal College of Art, two major figures in the design world

from Europe. How does the Contemporary Design programme establish a connection to the wider framework of the field of contemporary design?

**ANNA:** Of course together with Julia, we are quite aware of what happens when it comes to other schools, in the field of contemporary design.

**NATHALIE:** But what's our specialty? How do we differ from those?

**JULIA:** Well, I think one

specialty that we have is that our workshops are beyond. The workshops are amazing. We are really well-funded. Our students have very little loans when they leave us. And there is a lot of strategy and a lot of teaching and amazing people kind of coming together. But I think one thing where we really differ, which we still need to build more on but it's already visible, is that we are actually a university with different schools and different skill sets. We have the ability to connect to these other schools and have access to the experts in the school. So if you go to the RCA and you want to do anything and you need an engineer, then you have to knock on another university's door and find the right person. We have all of this on campus and collaborations that are already ongoing.

**NATHALIE:** CHEMARTS is a good example of that.

**JULIA:** Juan, you reached out to the engineering department for your thesis. There is this hybridization that is possible, and that should be built on. CHEMARTS is a brilliant example.

**ANNA:** It's also worth mentioning that we're quite remote in Finland. It's quite remarkable if you come from the other side of the world. You have the dark winters and all the nature around you. This can be very extreme. I think that what you can see sometimes in students' work is that nature, for example, does play a big role.

**JULIA:** Yeah. In the outcomes. And that can be a strength and a weakness. It's a weakness because, in a way, for us to make



the work seen, we have to work double as hard. If you're in a graduation show in London, then people come and see your show. But at the same time, we have a brilliant selection of people here – because we have the people who really want to be here, who really do their research, who figure out why this programme fits them, and who then come here deliberately. It's this nature-connectedness that's actually really outstanding in a way, it's a very different environment to study here than in other places in Europe.

**ANNA:** Yeah. Some of our students even mention it as being one of the reasons to apply.

**JULIA:** Yeah. Whenever I talk with people

“Remember this is one of the hardest jobs you can have, but also one of the most rewarding and satisfying. You're never finished; you need to reinvent yourself.”

from other schools, they're like, really, you have such small courses? How are you doing this? But maybe this is something –

**SIMO:** – we maybe should not tell. Here in Aalto Arts, we are expecting students to make their own product by themselves. In other schools, there's maybe a workshop supervisor helping, assisting a lot, and then the student has a very rough level in prototyping. But here we are really expecting the students to make that beautiful artefact or prototype or piece.

**ARTEFAKTI:** There's so much openness in the programme. Is there any overarching way to describe the aesthetic, or patterns that you frequently see coming up?

**JULIA:** It's really matter.

**NATHALIE:** Material matters.

**JULIA:** Materiality is such a fantastic way of thinking into the future and into the

past – it's kind of halfway there. It opens up many possible ways of what it could become. And at the same time, it still very directly links to where it's come from and what ecosystem or what other system it links from. So I think this materiality helps us to actually reflect on all of these future and past topics and somehow connect them. In a way, thinking about materials first, not object life cycles, for example, really helps us to think in this longer-term, longer timescale. And to bring a lot of the concerns we have into the projects because the materiality allows it; it's like it raises these questions almost by itself.

**ARTEFAKTI:** It's not so much about the object, but rather what the object is made of.

**JULIA:** Well, or, kind of what objects could become of these materials. What would make sense to make from this material? It's a different scale and narrative experience.

**ANNA:** Why choose that material? What does it mean to you? What do you want to say with it?

**JULIA:** Yeah. And I think if, for example, you have a final object – like, whatever... a clay pot – if you focus on this, then you are always thinking about manufacturing, production, sales and all of these things. But if you are starting with the material, then you're thinking what objects could become of it, but you're also very directly connected to where the matter comes from. Every school does that to some extent, because if you're designing, you know, cups, you always have to consider what material it's made of, but usually you focus a lot on the cup and a little on the material, and maybe on distribution. And we are focusing more on the matter. I think that's a really healthy point to focus on because it allows us to think more freely about what can come out. That's why materiality is so important.

**ARTEFAKTI:** Thank you for this conversation today. Do you have any final thoughts to add?

**NATHALIE:** Thank you. This was a very nice discussion.

**KIRSTI:** Remember this is one of the hardest jobs you can have, but also one of the most rewarding and satisfying. You're never finished; you need to reinvent yourself. I think the way we have these open briefs – or you have to write your own briefs – it's actually a very good skill to have in the future because when the world is changing, your personal life is changing, and the job situation is changing, you really need to find new solutions. How to go on from here, how can you use the experience that you have in another type of position?

**JULIA:** Be reflective and realise when something shifts, be a barometer for little shifts that are happening and be able to perceive them and then implement them and react to them through your work.

**KIRSTI:** Once you have the experience of writing your own briefs from the school, which is a relatively safe environment to do that, it makes you stronger in your life after school because you've done it before. You can look critically into your own choices of how things are made or done in places or in companies or wherever you're working. It's kind of an attitude.

**SIMO:** I remember this nice speech from John F. Kennedy. I don't remember where it was but it was about, 'Why did we send a man to the moon? Not because it's easy, but because it's hard.' That's kind of part of the DNA of a designer too. That we try to reinvent everything all the time, like how to improve it, how to make it different.

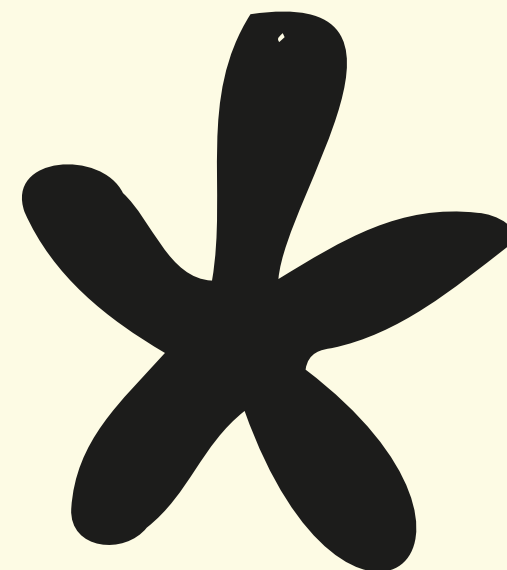
Kirsti: How to do it better.

**ARTEFAKTI:** Do you see yourself as contemporary designers?

**NATHALIE:** We are designers and we are living contemporarily. So definitely, yes, I am a contemporary designer.

**SIMO:** And after a few years we'll change the name of the programme anyway.

**NATHALIE:** Do you have any suggestions?



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# ALEJANDRA ALARCÓN

## EXPLORING CARE AND COLLABORATION THROUGH FOOD AND COOKING.

I'm a Mexican designer based in Helsinki, working in the intersection of art, design, and food. My work blends personal narratives, research, and material exploration that take the form of diverse artefacts, installations, or performances. Often centred around edible sculptures and immersive landscapes, my work is intended to be shared and eaten.

Through an intuitive and experimental approach, I rely on my own experiences as well as on collective memories to craft narratives that can explore care and togetherness. Cake, in particular, holds a special place in my artistic practice as the process requires care and embodied knowledge. It serves as a medium that evokes my childhood memories while simultaneously representing a universally cherished food.

My fascination with food and eating, its meaning and significance, including its aesthetic appreciation, builds up from my memories from home, where cooking is a meaningful act that requires patience and love. Remembrances of my home have inspired my work and transformed it into an interdisciplinary practice that includes deconstructing food as an edible and beautiful material and cooking as an artistic practice. My own food culture and non-culinary background in design allow me to create ephemeral edible works that can merge with other materials, resulting in multisensory and immersive experiences of remembering the past or speculating about tomorrow.



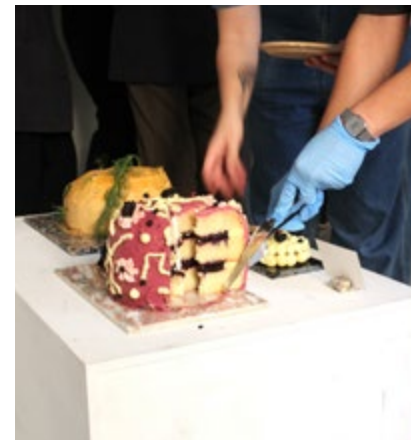
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PROJECT:



EXHIBITED

## EDIBLE LANDSCAPES: FOOD AS AN ARTISTIC MEDIUM.



Edible installation made of sweet and soft sculptures inspired by my own food culture and memories from home.

Along with vanilla and chocolate, this carefully crafted edible installation aims to transport the audience to my inner world of senses and intimate memories. Cooking and eating are sensuous rituals. Sharing homemade food with others can symbolise a caring act beyond eating together, where sourcing ingredients, recreating recipes, and cooking can convey notions of appreciation and love. By preparing food from home, I'm looking to create spaces to reimagine new worlds of memories where shared experiences, histories, and likes and dislikes may flourish. The cake works as a confection of meaning around different cultures, while at the same time being part of my childhood memories. This project materialises recipes and remembrances from my own food culture combined with my contemporary practice, by celebrating imperfection, soft colours, experimental shapes, landscape-inspired ornamentation, and nostalgic objects.

Medium:  
Food and supporting artefacts

Year of production:  
2023





EDIBLE LANDSCAPES: FOOD AS AN ARTISTIC MEDIUM.

## THE EXQUISITE DISASTER OF EATING



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THE EXQUISITE DISASTER OF EATING



This project explores the beauty of natural food pigments on hand-carved aspen wood through the messy act of eating tacos, resulting in a visually captivating canvas of colours.

In Western cultures, the table is such an essential element when eating, often covered to avoid staining it and to keep it clean. My aim for this project was to challenge this notion and embrace all those food stains, eliminate the idea of the tablecloth, and appreciate the beauty of natural food pigments on wood through the messy act of eating tacos.

I approached this project in an experimental way by hand carving a panel of soft aspen wood, resulting in different textures and relief carvings for the food to be placed. I crafted a simple yet enticing vegan taco menu, where later on participants were invited to eat the tacos in their own unique way. The porous nature of aspen wood allowed the pigments to be absorbed into this light-shaded material. The aftermath of this eating experience resulted in a rich and colourful canvas.

Medium:  
Aspen wood and food

Year of production:  
2022

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# ALICIA ROMERO ES FERNANDEZ

**EXPERIMENTING WITH MIXED MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES TO IMAGINE FEASIBLE REALITIES.**

I have always been interested in exploring how the objects around me are made. My design career started in Barcelona, where I grew up and completed my studies in Industrial Design Engineering. However, I still wanted to learn more about processes, techniques, and crafts. I wanted to experiment and get to know materials firsthand because I understood that the materiality of the objects and how they are made directly affect our daily life. Therefore, this is the topic that I have been examining since then. When I moved to Helsinki to complete a master's in Contemporary Design, the change of context made me notice the importance that our environments have on our practice. For this reason, my current work adds the cityscape as an extra layer to my vision.

I believe design has had an essential role in development and will also be crucial in the degrowth needed to accomplish a more sustainable future. For me, design is a tool for imagining futures, but also a tool to understand the past. In my practice, I experiment with mixed materials and techniques to imagine feasible realities. I also enjoy exploring and playing with diverse environments such as the city. My environment has always been a font of inspiration as well as the people and objects around me.

I enjoy using different mediums in my practice. I have used glass with paper or plaster, experimented with ceramic moulds, done experimental writing and video installation, and intervened in the cityscape. During these works, I have taken a sensible point of view, respecting the medium and letting it guide the

creation process, only intervening in it to add a critical perspective to challenge the established. In the end, all of those shape the environment we live in.



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PROJECT:

## URBAN HACKS



EXHIBITED



### A Study on Urban Elements and their Contribution to the Open City.

In the Urban Hacks project, design hacking is applied to elements of the cityscape of the city of Helsinki. Design hacking is the term that describes the resourcefulness of the individual stepping in when the products and systems that are offered fall short. Urban Hacks consist of modifications, additions, and transformations of the given infrastructure of the city. The objective is to inspire new narratives of the spaces by encouraging new uses.

Urbanscapes reflect the social circumstances of the cultures that inhabit them. As social situations change, public spaces must change as well to fulfil the necessities of the new realities. However, the deterministic method in which cities are built has assigned a specific purpose to each space.

Taking the city of Helsinki as a scenario, three urban hacks are designed to fit its local context. This experimentation is carried out using a non-deterministic approach, in which forms and uses of the elements are not defined beforehand.

Medium:  
Recycled wood and  
paint

Year of production:  
2022



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URBAN HACKS

URBAN HACKS

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# AMEDEO MARTINES



PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## INVESTIGATING FOREIGN TERRITORIES THROUGH MATERIALITY.

My artistic production can be described as a practice of exploration, understood as a personal attempt to read and bond with my surroundings.

I have deepened this methodology during my Contemporary Design studies, where it became an investigation tool to acknowledge and bond with the Finnish Heritage. This practice helped me thin that cultural barrier, which created distance and displacement, for a point of connection between the unfamiliar and my background. Through my work, I approach, tackle, and immerse myself in this foreign territory and culture, gathering information and creating a new, personal understanding of the surrounding environment.

My work is influenced, perhaps even resulting, from directly lived experiences in the reality around me. Therefore the research depth of a particular project is directly proportional to the amount of time spent in a specific location. Hence, by engaging, studying, observing, and often collecting found relics, I recognise subtle traits otherwise left unnoticed or overlooked. In my works, these elements constitute key components that embody my personal interpretation and bonding process with the history of such places.

The work showcased in this exhibition attempts to create an emotional overview of Helsinki's brick architecture, presenting a collection of fragments found around the main historical buildings of the city. The emphasis is on gathering, understood as a

practice to connect with a place and its heritage through the materiality of fragments. Within these fragments lie the traces of the architecture's history, and by collecting them, I had the opportunity to hold that history in my hands.



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## APPROACHING THE EARTHENWARE HERITAGE: ACCIDENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF BRICK BUILDINGS AND THEIR FRAGMENTS

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A tactile display inviting visitors to physically engage with brick architectural fragments collected throughout Helsinki and Espoo.

This project visually narrates the development and research that took place during my master's thesis. The thesis focuses on the history of brick architecture of Helsinki and Espoo and proposes a practical method to acknowledge, engage and bond with this cultural and material heritage, which was previously unknown and foreign to me.

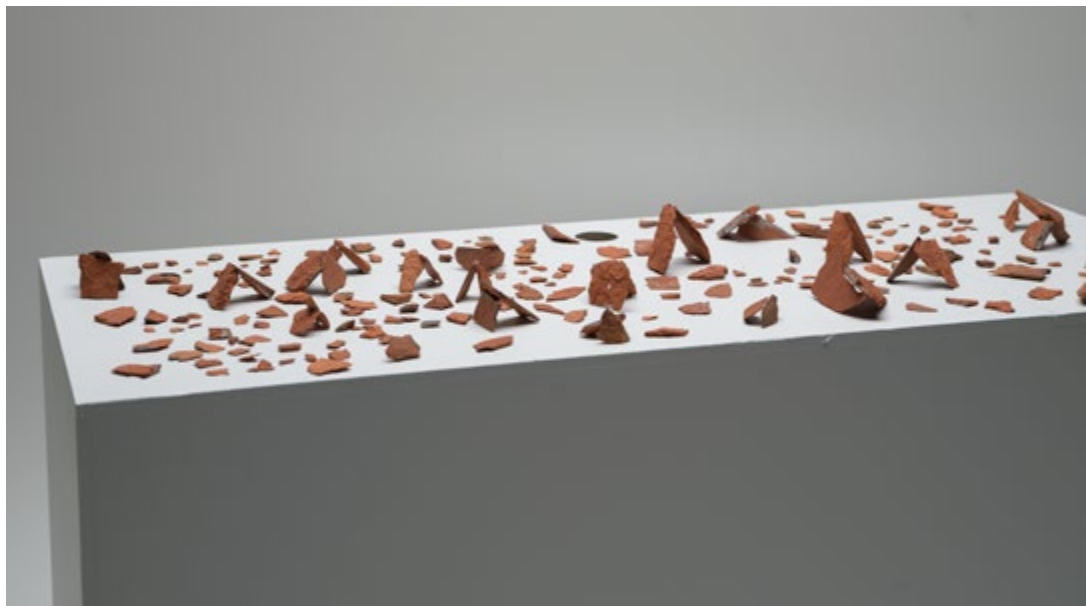
Through this method, architecture is physically encountered, awakening a series of sensory perceptions, such as haptic experiences, impossible to acquire solely through theoretical studies or images. The gathered knowledge becomes not a product of a historical narrative or the result of someone else's voice, but, on the contrary, deeply embedded and intertwined with the practitioner. As a result, the action of reaching a place, mapping its surroundings, and directly engaging with brick buildings allowed the practitioner to acknowledge details, architectural features, and specific historical traits that in our everyday life would, instead, remain overlooked and unrecognised. In particular, fallen brick fragments found along the perimeter of the visited architecture provided a clear hint of the condition, history, and a tangible link to their past. Fragments represent traces of the history of the architecture itself, and by collecting them, I had the possibility to hold the building's past in my hands.

In this exhibition setting, I decided to bring indoor the natural environment where these fragments were discovered, attempting to evoke the essence of the places they came from and sprout that sense of curiosity towards what often remains unnoticed. The visitor is free to handle and play with the fragments exhibited, for feeling their materiality and experiencing the hapticity heritage.

Medium:  
Found brick  
fragments and  
wooden frames

Year of production:  
2022

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APPROACHING THE EARTHENWARE HERITAGE:  
ACCIDENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF BRICK BUILDINGS  
AND THEIR FRAGMENTS



APPROACHING THE EARTHENWARE HERITAGE:  
ACCIDENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF BRICK BUILDINGS  
AND THEIR FRAGMENTS

# ENA NAITO



## DESIGN AS A TRANSITIONAL SPACE FOR KNOWLEDGE.

*I stare at the puddle lying before me and it echoes myself, but it stares back with a render of my body that is no longer solid, but a liquid. I distort and morph into various shapes, absorbing ripples and spilling over, my lip stretches and my eyebrows condense. The echo swells from trying to hold in more than it can, and I dissolve into the endless fleeting images that make myself be. Stepping into the mirror of the celestial body that is also the air I breathe, I walk the sky.*

I have always longed for a sense of belonging. Perhaps this is because I grew up rootless, moving across thirteen houses and five countries by the age of thirteen. Or perhaps this is because I wanted to find comfort in having a place I could call home. When I entered the world of design, I thought I could tether myself to it; that I could say “I’m a designer”, and everyone would understand. But instead of settling down, I only uncovered the slipperiness of design – full of leaking and morphing and spilling over. Like water.

Over the past few years, I have slowly come to grapple with belonging in that slipperiness, beginning to interweave seemingly distant voices with one another like an alchemist: Designing a functional kitchen through poetry; making a documentary about human anatomy and mushrooms; working in the laboratory to innovate a biodegradable packaging solution for cucumbers; writing a book with fishermen and with fragments of voices that were harvested, gifted, lost and found.

At one point I was dressed in a white lab coat, conducting experiments in test tubes and calculating numbers. At another, I was covered in colourful paint that never washed off my shirt. For several weeks, I was tangled in twigs, soil, and smelling of rain. At one moment, I was swimming with jellyfish and the

Baltic waves. One cusp of summer, I was dismantling a horse skeleton under the blazing sun.

\* \* \*

Scientists say that water dissolves things better than anything else on Earth. It never fixes itself to one place, but instead trespasses across differences – becoming rain, the tides, your body, your breaths. I wonder if design for me, is just like water. I wonder if this is where I belong.

I wonder.



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PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## THE ASYMPTOTES



### Illustrated creative nonfiction book and audio excerpt.

*The Asymptotes* carries stories about bodies of water – stories about our dependence on water; stories about the human body; stories about loss and desire; about the slipperiness of memory; about embracing uncertainty in times of change. The narrator’s falling dream overlays with a flying artist of the 1960s; this artist overlaps with *The Falling Man* and the shared history of 9/11. A single, almost inaudible whisper caught by the audio recorder in the meadows at dusk is taken 400 kilometres north where that whispered phrase provokes a memory from 70 years ago. A memory about the too-blue sky and under that, the drying river of the present; the drying body; the thirsty body; the desert plant. The Second Law of Thermodynamics and the physics of entropy; how the universe is becoming more disordered over time; how the ocean is becoming warmer over time; how the number of fish in these oceans is declining over time; how the fishing industry has disappeared over time. A scientific fact becomes a personal story; a whisper floats in white space; a voice carries on a stranger’s memory.

The narrative courses through many bodies of water that leak and absorb, across past and present, fluidly meandering through ideas, voices, and memories, as seemingly distant stories come into direct dialogue with each other.

Medium:  
Printed full-spread book and audio

Year of production:  
2022

Special thanks for gifts of stories:  
Sarah Simblet, Frank Henderson, Richard Oakes, Fred Normandale, David Normandale, Lindy Rowley, Andrew Fletcher, Brigid Davidson, Tom Fox, Ryan Sheader, Louise Davidson, Alex Davidson, Sonja Phillips, Jun Takeuchi, Chris Lunnon, Navid Mousivand, Cynthia Zhang, and volunteers at the Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre.

Editing, proofreading, and production:  
Zoë Robertson, Luca Hargitai, Tereza Maláčová, Midori Tanaka, Andrew Fletcher and Eila Hietanen.



THE ASYMPTOTES



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THE ASYMPTOTES

# GEORGE SEPPALA

CA

PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## LAKU

### CERAMICS CASTING POPULAR CULTURE AS INFORMAL "ARCHIVISM".



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Humor plays an important role in my creative process. Guided by what makes me laugh, infuses my work with a sense of joy, and fulfillment. Purposefully juxtaposing symbolism, form, and context, I create pathways for unexpected connections that encourage viewers to engage in introspection and amusement. Ultimately, my work embodies the convergence of theory and practice, bringing together diverse influences, introspective reflection, and a dedication to experimentation.

In regards to my works in this exhibition, I've discovered ceramic casting as a potent medium for preserving popular culture through a sort of unconventional 'archivism', reflecting what I believe is my creative responsibility to capture and document overlooked but genuine aspects of our culture.



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#### Large casted porcelain 'liquorice' sculptures.

For those who observe 'Laku', I imagine the depth of interpretations is likely to vary. Some may question if the project possesses a deeper meaning beyond its candy-like facade, prompting them to reflect on its possible connection to themes like consumerism, pleasure, and childhood. Others might view it as a playful homage to Finland's long-standing ceramic design and craft heritage. Encountering a massive ceramic liquorice could elicit amusement in the recognition of Nordic minimalist design principles within such a familiar form.

The meaning of 'Laku' is subjective to each viewer, with its significance belonging to everyone. Its form already occupies a space in our culture, memories, and appetites, independent of my initial intentions. Personally, the 'Laku' project has offered me a fresh perspective on engaging with popular culture and consumer goods. It has allowed me to delve into my own nostalgic experiences, prompting contemplation on their broader connections to culture and personal experiences of others. Observing how these emotions interrelate with varying shapes, colours, and cultural backgrounds has been enlightening, revealing the diverse ways in which emotions converge with art and design.

Medium:  
Ceramic

Year of production:  
2022

30



## THE HARVEST



LAKU

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Medium:  
Ceramic

Year of production:  
2023

Large ceramic replications of fruit and vegetable fridge magnets.

In this project, I transformed fruit and vegetable magnets into a collection of relief-style ceramic wall 'tiles'. These tiles are intended to be arranged together on a wall, reminiscent of the playful arrangement of magnets on a refrigerator.

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My fascination lay in utilising machinery to meticulously scale up and replicate the magnets in clay. Employing techniques like 3D scanning, CNC machining, plaster casting, and clay moulding, the process was intentionally time-consuming, allowing room for reflection. This choice was driven by a sense of irony inherent in adopting such an intricate approach.

Rather than opting for a straightforward manual method, this deliberate and extended engagement with technology became an integral aspect of the artistic piece. It challenged conventional notions of efficiency, emphasising the value of time, effort, and contemplation. Despite their origin as inexpensive, made-in-China magnets found at the bottom of a sales bin in a knick-knack shop, my commitment to their design was unwavering. I approached the reproduction of the magnets with the precision and care one might use to restore or reconstruct a valuable artefact, aiming for accuracy to the original design.

The project engages conceptually with the dynamic between technology and craftsmanship, sparking questions about the role of technology in art-making and the deeper meanings derived from a purposefully intricate creative process. This piece also examines consumer culture, prompting a reconsideration of the authenticity of objects and symbols preserved for future generations to understand the essence of our contemporary society.

# IINES

# NIEMELÄ



PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

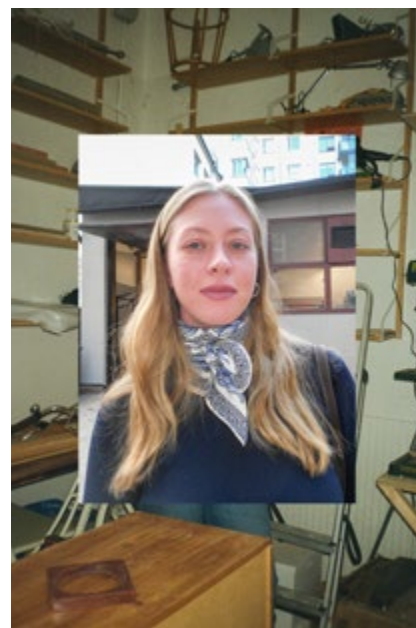
## TRANSLATING MEMORIES INTO SURFACES.

I am a designer and ceramic-enthusiast fascinated by playful, thrilling, enigmatic and effortless surfaces. Clay intrigues me with its intimate, poetical and whimsical characteristics. The material bends to many: it is delicate yet unwavering, unpretentious yet powerful and silent yet thought-provoking. Its transformation from malleable clay to definitive ceramics requires a purposeful touch and a high-fire full of surprises. Unpredictable mistakes and unplanned changes are part of the process. To me, imperfections strengthen the feel of the material and reflect the nature of the material.

Many of my works hover at the boundary between art and utility objects. I like to play with form and function. In my latest works, I have been interested in multi-sensory surfaces, structures and shapes that balance between emptiness and fullness. Simple geometrical structures combined with flowing organic forms and various textures provide theatricality, silence and drama that gives an insight into the stories lingering behind. I am intrigued by the sensorial and emotional feelings that can be evoked through associations using light, colour, shape and texture. In order to evoke feelings and surface recollections, my works hold hints from my own memories. Sharing something very personal creates an intimate connection with the viewer/experiencer and offers them an opportunity to experience something completely unknown but perhaps relatable.

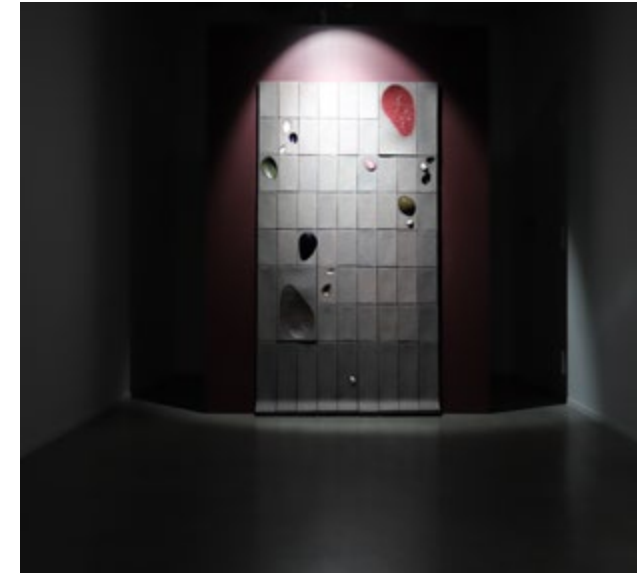
I draw my ideas from the diversity of the surrounding nature. The forms of the smooth seaside rock formations, the textures of the coarse soil and

colours of the diverse flora translate into rugged yet delicate ceramic tile surfaces and vessels. The themes I work with cover the relationship between man and nature, the interaction of the past and the present, and the juxtaposition of beauty and misery.



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## SEEKING SCENTS IN THE SHADOW OF A JASMINE BUSH



### Surfaces based on a memory and meaning.

Seeking Scents in the Shadow of a Jasmine Bush ceramic tile work is part of my master's thesis that investigates the role of multi-sensory surfaces in the built environment as a basis for meaningful and pleasurable habitats. As a criticism of eyesight's supremacy in our sensory system, this work invites to touch, smell, taste and hear.

Based on a childhood memory of mine, this ceramic tile work depicts the sensory elements from the past and translates them into the present. In order to evoke a holistic bodily experience, the work provides hints of my childhood surroundings. This connects the viewer from the present to a meaningful time and place from the past.

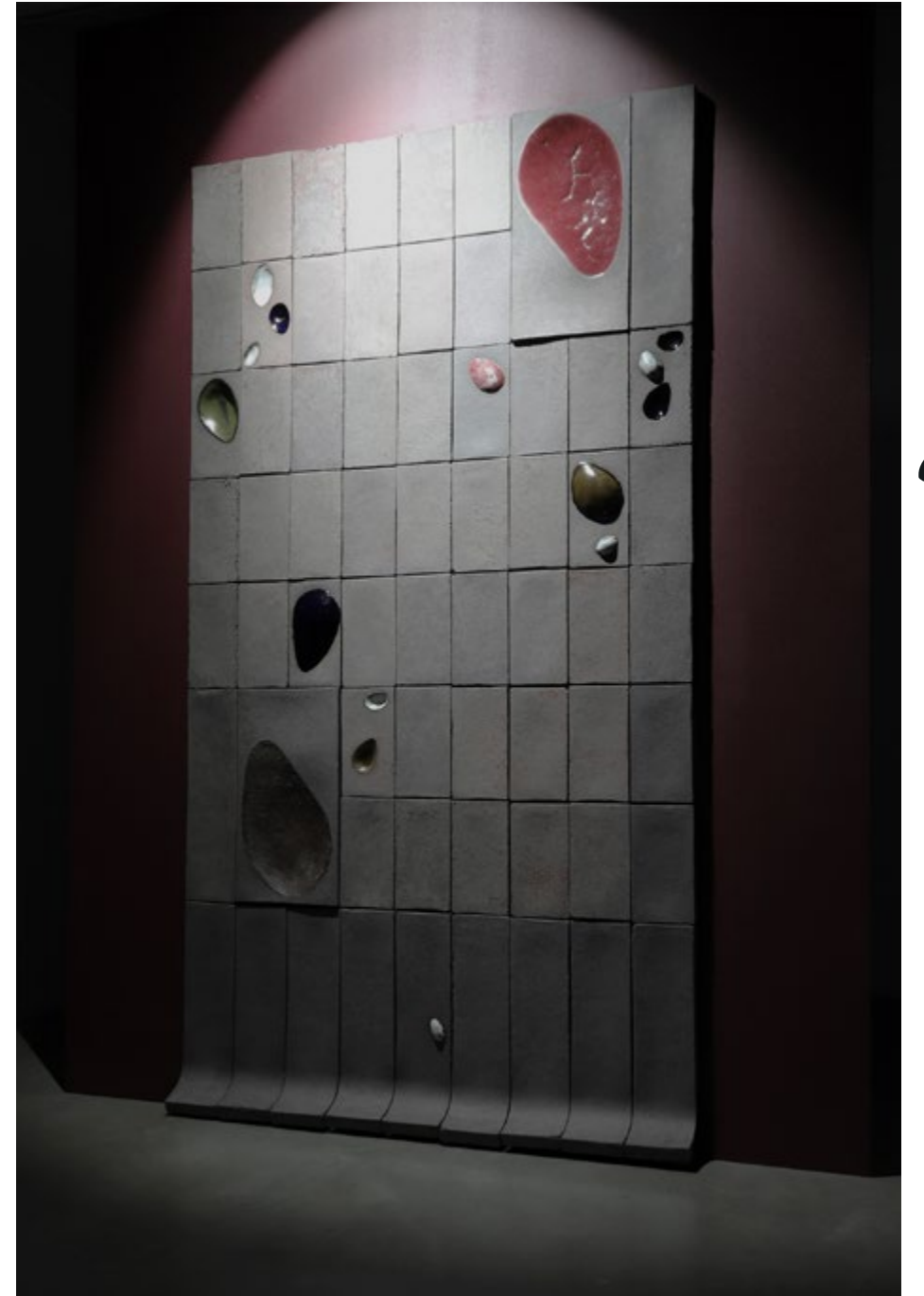
Medium:  
Ceramic, engobes and glazes

Year of production:  
2022

Special thanks to:  
Kirsi Kivivirta,  
Nathalie Lautenbacher,  
Tomi Pelkonen and  
Tatu Vuorio.



SEEKING SCENTS IN THE SHADOW OF A JASMINE BUSH



SEEKING SCENTS IN THE SHADOW OF A JASMINE BUSH

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# JUAN GUEVARA VERJEL



## FURNISHINGS AND SYSTEMS FOR SELF-CONTAINED WORLDS

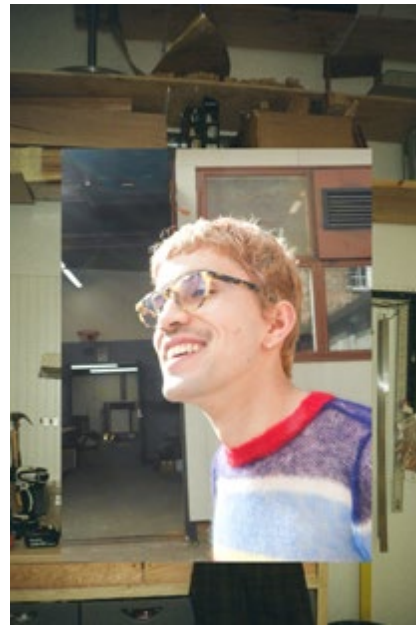
I've lived in more houses than I can count, from the Caribbean tropics to the Andes mountains and now the near-Arctic. At times spotting a familiar face, some others lost in foreign feelings. Growing up happened somewhere in between visiting the factories where my dad worked, hoping to grasp their automated processes, and obsessing over the crafts network on TV in a sheepish longing to replicate the papier-mâché pencil holder on the screen.

Design intrigued me with its vagueness and promise of adaptability. I could go from being a physicist to a screenwriter in a matter of hours. At a loss for words, I delegated the syntax to the objects I made. Clothes, jewellery, coding, several books and the odd table all confabulating, narrating. My projects spoke of parallel universes, of a god losing ground to a computer, the heist of a trillion dollar fish and the posthuman condition. More recently, I've been pondering the sun and what energy means in contemporary society.

Oftentimes, the process is about chasing an idea that starts as a hunch and then develops into a kind of grammar, or system. Through this approach, I see the objects I create as furnishings for the self-contained worlds I build and their governing logic. Torn between the anecdotal and the infinite, it all feels bearable at the scale of a chair. Iterative, borderline obsessive, I assemble catalogues of materials and finishings as a way of building an aesthetic vocabulary. The type of design I do reads like manufactured poetry.

At times it feels as if I'm being pulled into several,

uneven parts. I reflect on the seeming futility of design in the face of the great challenges of the world, or its alleged role as one of the main fabricators of our times. Entertaining the balance between giving shape and finding meaning.



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PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## SOLAR GRAMMARS: A VOCABULARY FOR ENERGY



A collection of Jacquard woven tapestries that employ ornament as a means to communicate energy.

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Even though energy is the backbone of contemporary society, it is very hard to put it into words. This project navigates the need to develop a formal language to approach energy. A type of vocabulary that would allow us to overcome the abstracted relationship that we have developed with the means that power our daily lives and in turn, to speculate on its possible futures.

Solar power is one of the fastest-growing forms of renewable energy and yet it struck me how stagnant it has remained. This is due in great part to the ubiquity of grid arrangements in solar energy, which have come to condition the way we imagine what the technology is or what it could be. From the individual solar cell to the disposition of solar panels on a field; orthogonal geometries are a staple of what solar energy is.

At the outset of solar energy is the sun. Standing at a vantage point for humanity throughout history, the sun has always been a larger-than-life phenomenon and a trigger for the imagination. There is something about the sun that instigates awe and delight which eludes solar energy.

My collection of jacquard-woven tapestries is a speculative response that proposes an alternative aesthetic for solar energy, mediated through ornamentation. "In The Grammar of Ornament" (1856), Owen Jones posited that ornament represents a universally intelligible form of communication which predated the spoken language, a kind of visual hypertext. By looking closely, ornament can be read

Medium:  
Jacquard woven  
tapestries

Year of production:  
2023

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Like a text, through its combined formal and symbolic meanings.

The motifs presented in these tapestries are a kind of collage of several styles and eras, creating a sense of temporal displacement. A combination of digital craft and material exploration where the cultural or emotional meaning linked to the sun coalesces with the technical language of solar panels. Textiles allow us to cover many kinds of surfaces, and their rich tactile qualities, when coupled with their pictorial content, act as effective agents for communication.

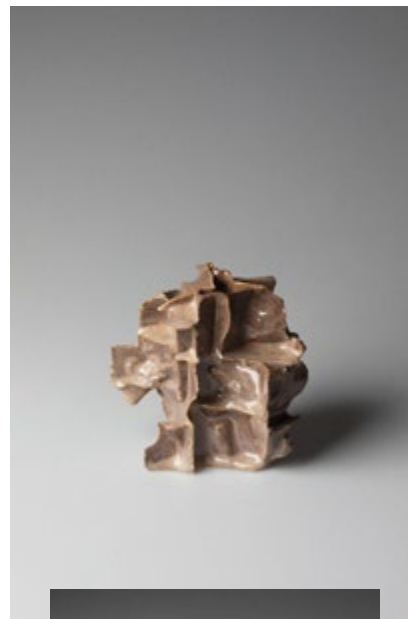


PROJECT :

2

EXHIBITED

## CRUMBS, OR THE SCRAPS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMORY



A series of porcelain pieces developed using reconfigurable moulds and 3D-printed ornamental fragments, where jagged shapes are used as a way to reflect on the fickle nature of memory.

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- "Mom, where are the records from my childhood?"

- "They're gone."

Sometimes certain memories stand out when recounting life, while others emerge more subtly in the background, almost as crumbs that fell off from the table.

The objects that were there but are no more became the starting point for the way forms arose. The soft curvature of the living room armchair, the chipped-off edges of the playroom walls and the buildings that I once called home but will never be able to go back to. Was it a flower that I handed to my mother as a child or the odd decoration at the dentist's office? These recollections, distorted and repaired, are replicated in a low resolution format that is then 3D-printed and placed alongside other fragmented memories.

The pieces were developed using a system of modular moulds, where each block was used repeatedly to give way to different forms, producing results that vary in complexity and size. I also developed a catalogue of glazes from which I studied the combination and behaviour of several metal oxides. Some pieces were wood fired, a process by which ashes adhere to the clay surface, emphasising its shapes.

*In the end I'm left to wonder, are there ever enough stories to summarise life?*

Medium:  
Modular slip cast porcelain sculptures with metal oxide glazes.

Tags:  
Year of production:  
2022-2023

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# JULIUS RINNE



PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## KOTISEUTU - HOME REGION

### EXPLORING NATURE, TRADITION AND SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CERAMICS.

I often find myself balancing on the edge of design and art, trying to find my own identity. Through my work, I aspire to convey feelings and create something meaningful, not only for others but for myself as well. That is why my work is always personal. Nature was a big part of my childhood and that is a common theme and inspiration for me. I am also interested in different cultures and their traditions, and I like to explore them by mixing traditions with the contemporary. My curiosity drives me forward constantly.

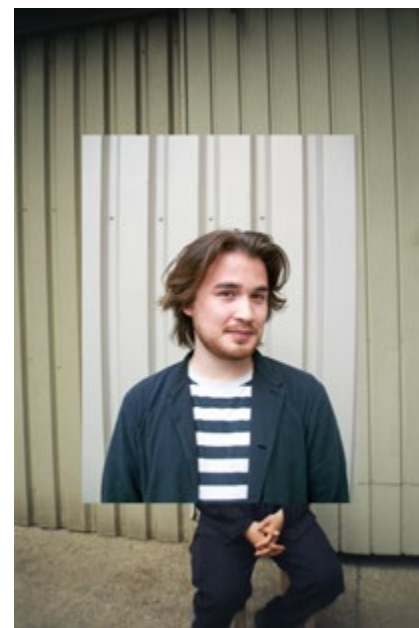
I found ceramics as a material and process during my bachelor studies, and it has stuck with me ever since. The ceramic process is very time consuming and requires patience and determination.

Hands-on working is the most rewarding way for me to work as a designer, and that is why the outcome of my work is very important to me and I enjoy focusing and working on details.

Gaining experience with ceramics has strengthened my designer identity by opening new ways to express myself. Every person has their own unique skill set which provides endless unique outcomes. That is why I don't want to restrict myself, but to be a multidisciplinary designer and artist, and work with different materials in the future.

With a strong basis in studio ceramics, I feel like I can have an impact in the field with my own actions. The modern questions of sustainability have made me

reflect on my own processes and values and made me rethink what it means to be a designer, a maker or an artist in the 21st century. I want to be a part of a new generation of sustainable designers and artists.



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### Experimental material research about using collected soil from Espoo together with ceramics.

This project is a part of my Master's thesis production. The project started from a desire to know more about the materiality of ceramics and where the materials come from. Nowadays it is possible to get ceramic materials from anywhere in the world, which is not sustainable. Could we find materials closer to our own environment?

Through material research, I wanted to focus on the unique and local raw materials that give an object a unique meaning. You can experience an item on a new level when you know exactly where the used materials are from.

The basis of the work is soil samples collected around Espoo in collaboration with Working with Soil-group in 2021 for a project that was exhibited at EMMA-museum in 2021-2022. I used the materials and knowledge we gathered and did my own experiments by applying the soil into my own ceramic design process.

The project displayed consists of maps of the soil gathering places, ceramic test tiles, and porcelain objects where the soil slips are applied in different ways and used in the context of studio ceramics as a way of connecting locality with an object.

Medium:  
Ceramics

Year of production:  
2021-2022

Collaborators:  
Maarit Mäkelä,  
Riikka Latva-  
Somppi, Özgü  
Gündeşlioğlu,  
Amedeo Martines

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PROJECT :

2

NOT EXHIBITED

# HIRAGANA



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KOTISEUTU - HOME REGION

## Ceramic object series in the shapes of Japanese characters.

The Hiragana project sparked from my own interests towards the Japanese language after studying it for several years. It is a series of ceramic objects in the shapes of various hiragana; Japanese characters. The objects can be used as vases, item holders, decorative objects or building blocks for writing words.

The series was born after I wanted to combine my appreciation towards the Japanese language with my experience with ceramics and create something unique. I wanted to lift the characters from their typical 2-dimensional written state to a 3-dimensional sculptural state. There was also a sense of playfulness in creating something that only people who know Japanese can understand, and read what the objects "say". It adds a new layer of meaning and a way to connect with people. However, I also wanted to make the objects easily approachable and enjoyable for people who are not familiar with the Japanese language. The sculptural and elegant shapes of the characters really help with this.

There are 7 different characters in the series: と, つ, っ, さ, ち, ひ, の.



HIRAGANA



Medium:  
Slip casted  
porcelain

Year of production:  
2021-2022

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# MIIA

# LÖTJÖNEN

## MATERIAL DILEMMAS AS CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES.



PROJECT :



EXHIBITED

## MATERIALS IN FLUX - A CREATIVE APPROACH TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY MATERIAL DILEMMAS

4F

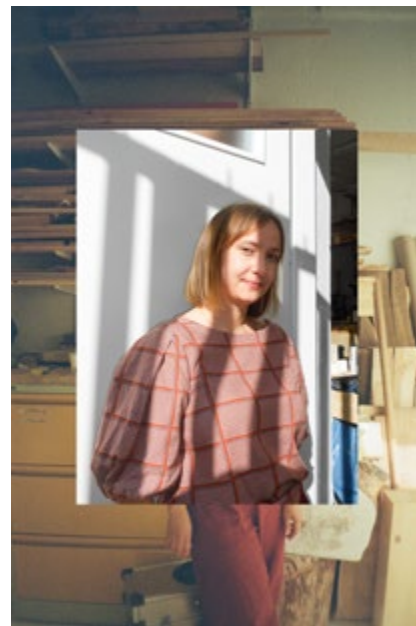
Throughout my design studies, I have worked in a material-oriented way. This is probably because I am also a glass artisan specialising in glass blowing. Hot glass is a very interactive and living material. It is a fascinating co-worker that has taught me a lot about patience and the sensitivity required to work with any material. With the help of design studies, I have learned to expand my perspective on how to look at my work and I find it fascinating to study and imagine the meanings of objects and materials beyond their functions.

Lately, I have focused on outlining design methods for sustainability. Materials, their meanings, impacts and especially how they are used are at the centre of my work. In my master's thesis production, I return to materialities after coming to a conclusion: If the technosphere is heavier now than the remaining biomass on our planet, I believe there is already enough material and objects existing that I can create with.

My practice as a designer utilises circular design principles with local waste materials and explores the relationship between humans, materials and the environment. Bottle glass that I use is seen as low value and mundane material, and with my work I try to find novel perspectives on it by removing it from single use context. This is done by applying artisanry methods into industrial material.

Through this practice I engage with the story of the material, and explore its potential in order to create a more respectful relationship with it. The aim of my

work is to pay attention to what is happening in the system before and after that object is designed, in order to understand its entire lifecycle and seek new ways to know the materials I have chosen to use.



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### A study used practice-led research methods to produce knowledge on how a material-oriented designer could better consider the long life cycles of materials

These exhibited works are part of my thesis research where I used locally found bottle glass and packaging plastics as materials. The materials were chosen as they circulate in an existing household waste recycling system in Finland. Through practice-led research, I sought a way to work with these local materials and expand the scope from object design to lifecycle design. My aim was to shift the perception of these materials from household waste to valuable resources for creative expression, and simultaneously create knowledge and foster a creative process that seeks to uncover their potential.

Medium:  
Glass blowing and sculpting

Year of production:  
2023

Glassblowing assistance:  
Zack Compton

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MATERIALS IN FLUX - A CREATIVE  
APPROACH TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING  
CONTEMPORARY MATERIAL DILEMMAS



# MIRA



# NIITTYMÄKI

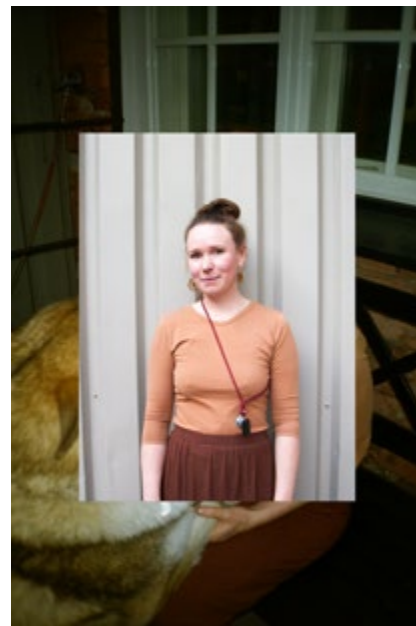
## ARTEFACTS AS AN EMBODIMENT OF TRANQUILLITY AND CARE.

My lifelong passion for arts and crafts has always been fueled by a deep appreciation for the unique qualities of different materials. This fascination eventually led me to pursue a BA degree in glass art and ceramics, and a Master's degree in Contemporary Design. In my creative practice, I seek inspiration from everyday adventures, nature connection, and tiny details of my surroundings. My approach to the themes I deal with is quite critical, but I try to handle them through optimism and care. Through my work, I wish to offer the viewer experiences of unity and tranquillity, and colour them with passion and mystique. The slow and deliberate nature of my craft processes balances my desire to constantly generate new. The time and care I put into each piece allows me to reflect on the recurring themes of my work, such as synergy and unity.

Materials themselves are also a source of inspiration for me, even though I find some of their qualities limiting. These limitations work as guidelines and triggers for ideas throughout the making process. Understanding how materials behave and how they are created is essential in my work, and it is a skill that I constantly want to develop. I would consider material literacy and curiosity for practice-led empirical research as my strong points as a designer.

In my mind, every raw material that I use is somehow magical but can be seen as very mundane at the same time, and I find this contrast deeply intriguing. I prefer to acquire and process materials myself when possible and believe that using locally sourced ingredients can help to create a stronger connection

between the designer, the material, and the surrounding ecosystem. This way, the created artefact is an embodiment and a component of a greater story that continues even after the item no longer exists.



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PROJECT:



EXHIBITED

## YHTÄ



# 51

### Pair of sleeping wolf-like ceramic sculptures.

Inspired by the innate ability of animals to wholly inhabit the moment they are in, this artwork serves as a reminder of the connection we as humans often overlook. The sculptures capture the essence of the wolves' peaceful presence as a contributing part of the surrounding ecosystem, radiating a sense of calm and unity.

The delicate interplay of ceramic and glass creates a harmonious synergy, symbolising the delicate balance we must seek between our modern lives and the natural world that cradles us. The work manifests the beauty in simply being present and meaningfully connected to our surroundings.

Medium:  
Hand-built ceramics  
and free-blown glass

Year of production:  
2021

# 50

WILD



## Test pieces for domestic material research and ceramic sculptures of a lynx and a black woodpecker.

The goal of this research was to find a domestic high-fire clay body that could be woodfired. Domestic high-fire clay bodies are not commercially available in Finland and I was determined to find a recipe for one by using “wild” clay materials. The work consists of a series of test pieces fired along the research and ceramic sculptures made with the researched materials.

The inspiration for the sculptures is drawn from the wild nature of the materials. The wild is commonly perceived as something living and free. For me, the wild is something natural. The wilder something is, the closer it is connected to nature. Although the wild is often seen as unbounded, for me, it is something that carefully fills its ecological niche and works by instinct in perfect interaction with nature. I wanted to depict wild animals in their usual and simple everyday actions: eating and bathing. Functions that we as humans have shaped so complicated for ourselves.

Medium:  
Hand-built ceramics

Year of production:  
2023

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## SOIL CARE PRODUCTS



## Porcelain cosmetic bottles for soil.

What if we treated soil as we treat our skin? After all, soil is the skin of the Earth, and our own skin is soil for billions of microbes. This project investigates ways to care for the degraded land and barren soil resulting from human actions. It also speculates on a future where soil care would be one of our daily routines. The work includes photography that adopts its appearance from the marketing images of cosmetics. This gives the work a slightly satirical twist that comments on the current oversaturated status of cosmetic products and beauty care over more fundamental issues.

Medium:  
Casted porcelain,  
hand-formed  
borosilicate glass,  
and photography

Year of production:  
2022

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# PAUL



# FLANDERS

## STORYTELLING THROUGH STRUCTURE, RITUAL AND RELIC.

I took a scenic route to design. With previous studies in philosophy and history, I developed an appreciation for objects and spaces from the sidelines whereas my studies at Aalto have been almost entirely studio focused. As a result, my comfy space lies somewhere in the middle – a bricolage approach that is material-led and narrative-based.

The starting point is an assumption that the materials we use to shape the world around us, shape us in turn. There is a physical relation, as in the literal carving out of earth to create new vistas – but materials are also tools for thought. In ways both historical and metaphorical, materials reveal changing ways of seeing the earth and our place on it. This goes for the past, the present and, as is becoming increasingly apparent in design, the future. How we see materials affects what we currently do and what we can imagine (doing) with them.

At the same time, objects tell stories. They may contain a tale of their coming to be but they always suggest a future, a world where they belong. My narrative approach to design aims to put this quality of objects to use and to challenge popular ways of seeing materials and their origins. With the Kudos collection, I wanted to express a belief that the longstanding joy we take from the narratives within objects designed from natural materials is the same joy we derive from the stories in nature itself.

More recently, I have started to think about this kind of material-led and narrative-based design as storytelling through ritual and relic. In both cases, the objects and the world in which they help substantiate moments where materials, manners and

metaphors join together to produce (potentially) new meanings to the otherwise familiar. Objects and spaces that add this kind of conscious storytelling can add significance and humour to every day, and maybe even remind us of something new.



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PROJECT:



EXHIBITED

## KUDOS COLLECTION



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Medium:  
Curly Birch &  
European Oak with  
natural oil & wax  
finish

Year of production:  
2022-2023

### Woven wood works in Curly birch and European Oak.

Inspired by the interwoven wood grains of Curly birch, the Kudos Collection is a creative exploration of the symbolics of figured wood and an expression of the origins of wood as tree. They draw from a textile language to enhance the structural legibility of figured wood. The collection consists of three pieces: a Lo Table, Hi Chair, and a Split Tray.

The works were designed as a gesture towards the increasing marginalisation of trees amidst, what many are calling, the dawn of the “age of timber”. The works reflect on the disconnect between wood and tree. The optics of Curly birch, as a genetically unique figured wood, visualise the direct link to its life as a tree while its contorted, gnarled and twisted forms as a tree figure prominently in depictions of the wildness of nature.

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## SHY CHAIR



Medium:  
Finnish larch with a touch of apple with natural oil & wax finish.

Year of production:  
2023

### A side chair with a playful disposition.

The Shy Chair is a four, but nearly three-legged chair designed for easy living whether you're indoors, outdoors or some place in-between. The simple, vernacular chair combines turned legs, CNC milled backrest with hand carved elements. The paired back design exposes a structural legibility intuitively familiar while visually unexpected.

## T0 ASSEMBLAGE



SF

### Hand-blown glass with a modular mould.

T0 assemblage is a collection of stratified glass artefacts blown in a tiered, modular mould consisting of layered sections that can be rearranged, rotated, removed and mirrored resulting in an unsettled process of chance and formation.

Drawing from an uncommon geological process of stratification wherein a single organism extends through multiple geological strata, the artefacts have an immediate visual connection with their formation. The artefacts are a meditation of alternatives to the way we are accustomed to thinking: layer after layer the old is buried beneath the new.

Medium:  
Clear and coloured glass  
Year of production:  
2020

Glassblower:  
Teemu Kylvo

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## DISCOVERING THE ROOTS OF HUMANITY AND THE ONTOLOGY OF THE PHENOMENA IN OUR REALITY BY THE WAYS OF ART.

## C'MON, FOLLOW ME ACROSS THE RAINBOW AND I'LL SHOW YOU THE WAY TO THE DREAM VALLEY

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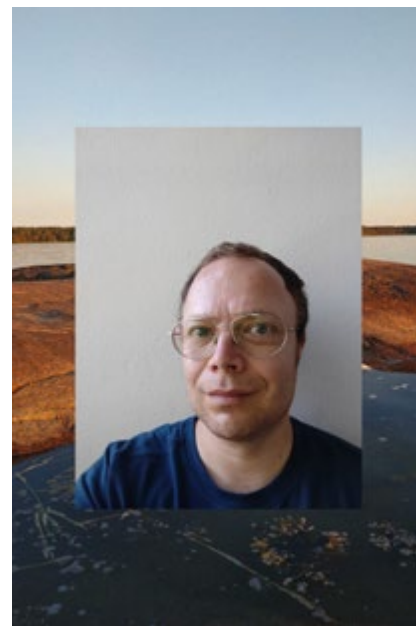
In the field of art and design, I identify most as a sculptor. Art is the most natural tool for me to explore and comment on humanity and society. Introspection and the lingering consideration of human emotional cause-and-effect relationships and their social effects are built into me.

The figures in my sculptures come from children's popular and toy culture. The physical and meaningful connection of my works is created through an intuitive process. I add layers and meanings to the works by familiarising myself with the publications that cover the topic I am dealing with.

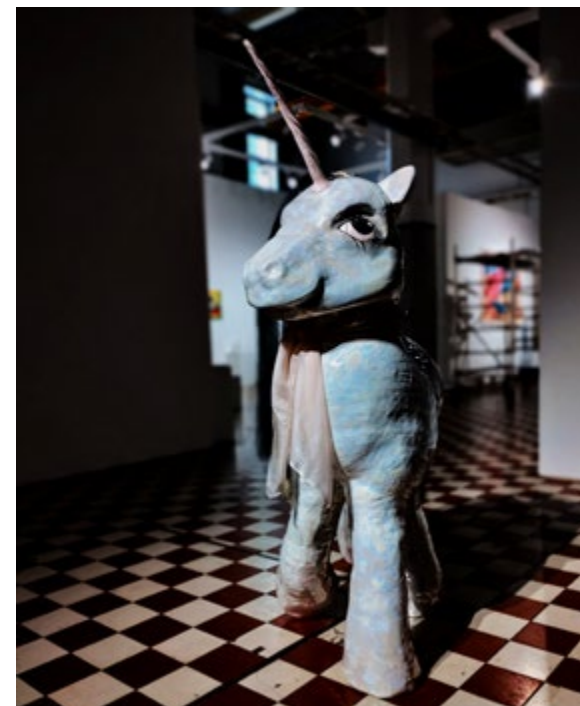
My works are built slowly due to the natural method for me – handbuilding ceramics. The method is also important to me because of its tactility and haptics. I am in direct contact with the material through my hands. The articles I read shape the meaning of the work at hand in my mind, even though I reach the optimal state of consciousness, i.e. the state of flow, almost immediately when I start making something concrete. These meanings are eventually layered into my sculptures, and I am able to communicate them both through the works and verbally.

I have been working on the same subject area since 2018. I love the long-term and unhurried focus on the topics I cover. For me, it is important that the work does not have to be done in a hurry, but that I can calmly digest it, for example, with long three-hour walks, while working in a state of flow with my work,

or with insights made by my brain during sleep. The thought is not born by force, but the brain as an organ gives it when it gets enough free time to process things.



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Medium:  
Handbuilt  
stoneware, engobes,  
glaze, lustre,  
horsehair, silk

Year of production:  
2021- 2022

Acknowledgements:  
Tomi Pelkonen

A sculpture installation that takes a stand on populism through satire.

Populism – the age-old plague – now needs more criticism than perhaps ever before. Democracies from Europe to South America are affected by this vicious epidemic. Its direct consequences include Covid denial among the Brazilian leadership, the Capitol attack in the United States and the problems with the rule of law principle in Romania, Poland and Hungary, and Brexit is also related to this phenomenon. Not to mention Putin's war in Ukraine.

As an overall effect of the work, I am looking for it to bring about a positive attachment and even transition to in-groups that intentionally separate themselves from populism in terms of group-identity and self-identity. I hope that this attachment will take place through work in a positive sense, without contempt and aggression towards out-groups (populists and their supporters), which have proven in studies to just fuel the populist voices by deepening the polarisation of our societies and further normalising hate-speech. However, at this point, I understand that I am outsourcing the responsibility for the feelings evoked by the work and the subsequent actions to the viewer. The satirical approach is also one of the work's essential means of effectiveness. Humour is known to make things easier to absorb.

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# MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE



Medium:  
Handbuilt  
stoneware, engobes,  
gold

Year of production:  
2020

Acknowledgements:  
Tomi Pelkonen and  
Kari Kääriäinen

A study of social inequality and especially the attitudes that fuel it and the culture behind these attitudes.

Is it the case that increasing wealth, which accumulates in relation to an ever-increasing number of people, inevitably makes the better-off in society feel that their position is self-righteous? And that this position depends solely on one's ability and diligence? Is the selfishness of people in relation to nature connected to the wealth and our meritocratic culture of economic growth that has continued in recent years?

Our current culture seems to be raising some of us into turbocharged broilers who focus on increasing their own financial status at any cost. In this case, empathy towards those in a weaker position might lead to actions that do not contribute to this widening of the economic gap between oneself and others. It also seems that in order to maintain this self-righteous position, they are prepared to act in at least morally questionable ways. On the other hand, it seems that as socioeconomic status increases, personal ethical norms may be shaped to justify greed, antipathy, and breaking common rules.

Luckily, the cultural attachment to our lifestyle, values and ideals and identity means that we could eventually choose otherwise. Our social system, which is focused on consumption and based on growth and gaining economic power, is starting to come to an end. Humanity must find a common development path as a more efficient way to organise the activities of our societies. As with all major changes in history, which contemporaries have not been able to observe around them, the beginning of this development has hopefully already actually happened.

# THE AESTHETICS OF CHANCE



Medium:  
Handbuilt porcelain,  
engobes, glaze,  
gold, platinum

Year of production:  
2021

Ceramic works in which gravity acts as an omen of chance.

Phenomena shaped, born and occurring in nature – geological formations, landscapes, living creatures, moving snow, the movement of waves, the dance of flames and the pulsating glow of embers, even installations formed by fallen leaves – are generally considered aesthetically beautiful and mentally calming. What these have in common is the pure chance behind their creation process. Is it possible to achieve the same aesthetics and calming effect in art, whose shapes and composition are largely due to chance?

As the process brewed in my mind, I realised that the work at hand had a contact surface with the aesthetics of chance. The execution method of the works has been predetermined, but chance had the last word in their appearance. Gravity acts as an omen of chance in ceramic works. The variations in the final form of the work are created by chance assisted by gravity.

For me, the aesthetics of chance is another subject of artistic research. I also focus on the study of humanity and society by adding layers and meanings to work that derive their physical inspiration from children's popular and toy culture, by familiarising myself with the publications of social psychology and other humanities that address the topic I am dealing with at any given time. The aesthetics of chance is a counterweight to this sometimes-burdensome research that goes deep into humanity.

# VERTTI



# VIRASJOKI

## INTROSPECTION ON MASCULINITY, SPORTS AND MANHOOD.

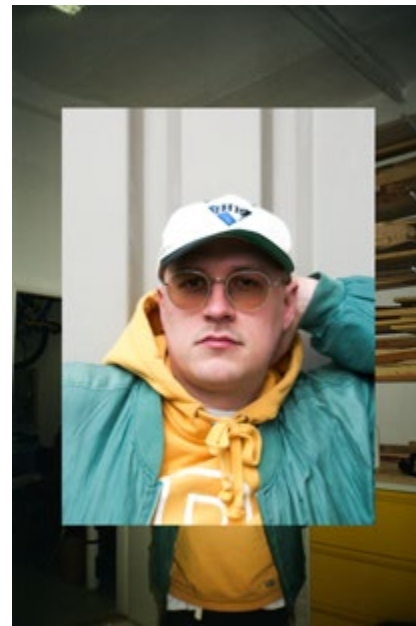
Design has always appeared to me as an ambivalent matter – nearly impossible to comprehend. In the early days of studying, design's fascination to me was more the aesthetic sort. I wanted to learn and understand where these forms and ideas for those came from and what shape they would become next. After having my focus on the immediate materiality of objects, I became more interested in the experimental ways of how design was being implemented.

Where would this field of design be heading in the midst of several global crises from the environmental one to the war in Ukraine? More communal, socially and politically engaged topics were occupying my thinking – what would be the purpose and use of a designer or an artist in this era of constant crisis? Would it even differ from the one before? And should it?

Even though the times seemed to ask for more of what community is and how to interact with others, I ended up being tuned more inwards. Maybe it was due to the realisation that in being able to understand others, I needed to figure out myself first, or maybe the overwhelming feeling of crisis led me to search for comfort from places I had found it before as a young boy. Turning inwards led me to inspect profoundly where I came from and to express that through art to make sense of it. Aforesaid is being manifested in my MA thesis, in which through the self-portrait photographs alongside the autoethnographic writings, I explore my journey, place and identity in this world. This has taken me on a trip to physically and mentally revisiting the cultural contexts I grew up in.

While working with the topics at hand in the thesis: masculinity, sports and manhood, I started to delve

deeper into the relation between sports & arts, and there seems to be something fascinating in how similar, yet different they feel to me. I am starting to feel that the next phase will be a focus shift once again, to start to look more around instead of within myself, to find or create a community to work with.



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PROJECT:

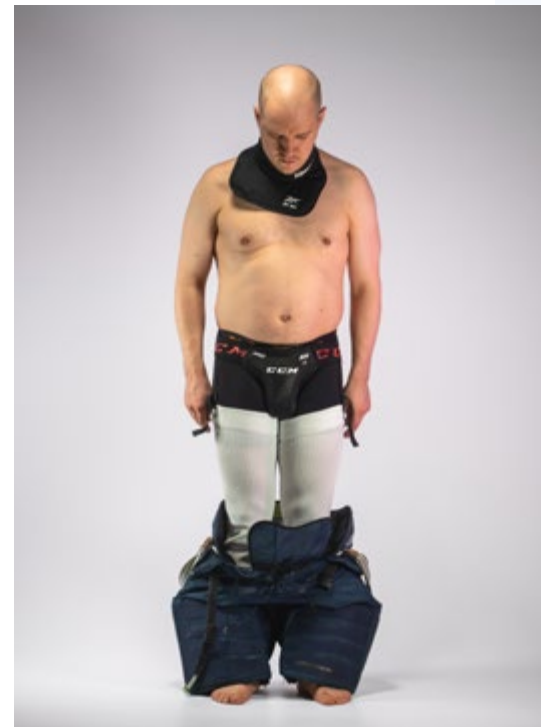


EXHIBITED

## DEAR HOCKEY



# 63



An artistic exploration that combines photographic works and written essays, delving into the author's personal journey and experiences within the world of ice hockey.

The master thesis Dear Hockey: Ponderings on Masculinity in Ice Hockey Culture is an artistic research and exploration that combines photographic works and written essays, delving into personal journeys and experiences within the world of ice hockey, examining the production of gender, challenging societal notions of masculinity, and seeking to initiate discussions on inclusivity and diversity within the hockey community. Topics such as violence, succession and corporality are being explored, both through the self-portraiture photographs alongside the essays. Beyond personal introspection, the project strives to shed light on the construction of masculine identity within the context of ice hockey while also noting its effect on society on a larger scale as well.

Medium:  
Digital photography

Year of production:  
2021-2023

# 62





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DEAR HOCKEY



# Credits

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## ARTEFAKTI

AALTO UNIVERSITY MA IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN  
GRADUATION SHOW

HEAD OF PROGRAMME  
Maarit Mäkelä

GRADUATION CATALOGUE 2023

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Antti Grundstén

CATALOGUE COORDINATION  
Juan Guevara Verjel

PROOFREADING  
Ena Naito  
George Seppälä

ARTEFAKTI AND FACULTY INTERVIEW TEXT  
Zoë Robertson

FACULTY INTERVIEW  
Juan Guevara Verjel  
Zoë Robertson

TYPEFACES  
ARTEFAKTI (Antti Grundstén)  
Gaisyr (Dinamo)

PAPER  
Galerie Art Silk

PRINTING, BINDING AND FINISHING  
Trinket Oy

PARTICIPANT PHOTOGRAPHY  
Alejandra Alarcón, Amedeo Martines, Juan Guevara Verjel

PARTICIPANT COLLAGES  
Alejandra Alarcón



**ARTEFAKTI** is an annual exhibition showcasing work done by new graduates from the Contemporary Design MA programme (CoDe) at Aalto University. Using a range of mediums, we cover themes spanning from craft, heritage and identity to energy, fiction and possible futures.

The name **ARTEFAKTI** references the common thread of CoDe's courses, where students produce artefacts of different orders – be they material, digital, conceptual, collaborative, or otherwise – as an inquiry into the role of design objects in society. **ARTEFAKTI** aims to showcase the broad-spanning creative outcomes of the programme and, more importantly, to highlight the unique stories of the individual designers emerging from the Master's. As such, **ARTEFAKTI** has no overarching theme. Rather, each graduate has shared their own Designer Narrative outlining their personal approach to contemporary design and tracing their path to and through their practice.