

F I N D I N G
P R E S E N C E
O F T H E
A B S E N T

To those who are soon forgotten.



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So I do not forget.

Thank you my fellow crafters and especially my master class for discussions and company. Thank you ädellab-technicians for all your help. Thank you friends and family who have read my text and helping out when in need.

Thank you Viktor and Nore, my biggest support in life.

And thank you to my grandmothers who always tell me stories about everyone in the family, so I can continue.

Abstract

This paper concerns the ordinary stories. It is about the forgotten and the things that have gone unnoticed. It is about female history and is a political exploration into what and who is allowed to take space. I focus on everyday life in a domestic space, where I see these things that are discarded, often are overlooked and not talked about.

I explore society from a kitchen point of view with a grandmother's life in focus. It is a story about everyday rituals in the home, which are of an important cultural deed. The objects support her in these rituals, and they also help me to tell.

I investigate the memorial space and with my artistic practice I create a room to remember those who are soon no longer with us.

In this project I work within the craft-field of corpus. I use the tradition of corpus as a method of working but also as a tool to discuss my subject. As corpus is talking about class and hierarchies it creates a counterweight to my project.

Keywords:

The ordinary, forgotten, absence, silence, the hidden, female history, memorials, everyday life, corpus, craft

Index

Introduction	5
Background	6
<u>Context/Theory</u>	
Forgotten/Time/Disappearing	8
Void/Loneliness/Remembrance	11
Silence/Stories matter/Around the kitchen table	14
<u>Practice/Method</u>	
Memorial spaces/Domestic space as a memorial	17
The house/The room/The walls	20
Recipe/Mould/Pattern	22
<u>Discussion/Conclusion</u>	
Lets sit down	30
My walls	31
After washing the dishes	32
<u>References</u>	
Notes	35
Bibliography	37
Publications	38
Multimedia	38
Images	38
Unpublished material	39
<u>Appendix</u>	
After all	40

Introduction

12th October

My grandmother is like most grandmothers from a small village on the Swedish countryside. She arranges her hair every morning before breakfast even though she won't meet anyone that day, she cleans her house every week because she has always done that, she doesn't need to read her recipes when she bakes because her hands remember, she always has cookies in the freezer in case she gets a visit – because how would it look if she had none, she always listen to the local radio station when she does the crosswords with her morning coffee. She is not extraordinary to anyone but my family. As most grandmothers. The ones who soon are no longer with us.

This project concerns the ordinary stories, the ones that have not had the ability to take space. It is about the forgotten and the things that have gone unnoticed. It is about female history. I want to focus on everyday life in a domestic space, where I see these things that are discarded, often are overlooked and not talked about. I want to explore the concept of memorials and the rituals surrounding them, as I have not seen this theme represented in a memorial space.

My starting point is my grandmother and her house, a typical working class home of the time. I see a woman here, who is working and has always worked in the hidden. She is never acknowledged, nor the objects surrounding her. I also see a connection between this generation and mine, and the objects surrounding us.

In this project I work within the craft-field of corpus. I use the tradition of corpus as a method of working but also as a tool to discuss my subject. As corpus is talking about class and hierarchies it creates a counterweight to my project.

This is a personal and a collaborative project. It is also a political exploration into what and who is allowed to take space.

Research question:

How can I make the forgotten and the invisible in a domestic space visible, by working with the corpus tradition as a method, and critically explore and investigate these themes through my writing and artistic practice?

Background

It is said that one is forgotten three generations after your death. My great grandmother will be forgotten with my child, like everyone else who lived during that period of time. The only things left of her are some objects she lived with, lived in. Fragments of her. Soon my grandmother will disappear too; will she also be reduced to fragments when she is laid in the soil?

As I look upon my female relatives I see people who have been neglected throughout history. Those who took care of the household, the children and everything that came with it. Those who have been mending, taking care of and caring for their surroundings and their things. This is a culture of how to be, traditions that we carry with us even if we do not want to. We are constantly pressed in to a mould. A legacy that has been passed down for generations.

In order to make things visible in the invisible, I want to create a room to remember. I want us to remember what is created in the everyday, this on-going act, the ordinary. There are so many women who did not have a voice in history, who were passing by unnoticed. Women who may have had much to tell but have not always been able to; they had other things to do which they thought were more important or they just had no opportunity to speak up. I see a grief, a personal grief over all the grandmothers who have not been able to take space in history that are now gone, or about to disappear, but also a grief of our present social structure concerning these matters. We have to remember that the written history is always from a perspective where certain parts have been deselected.

I want to investigate what happens in a domestic space, that I see is a place for the forgotten. I want to give these forgotten things a room for their stories to be told. This room, with so many memories will become a memorial. A memorial containing the unheard, the forgotten, that we as a society decided not to recognize. It is time to acknowledge this.

For me it is important to work within the craft-field of corpus. Corpus is the Scandinavian word used for hollowware. Traditionally one would find corpus amongst the upper-class and bourgeoisie and the craftsmanship of corpus was traditionally performed by men. Therefore, making corpus involves a question of class and hierarchy. Corpus has its own old traditions applied to it where I as a maker do not fit in. Like my project that talks about the ability to take space, I want to take space in the field of corpus. I use corpus as a method of working but also as a counterbalance to what I want to discuss.

CONTENT

/ THEORY



Private picture

Forgotten/Time/Disappearing

Time is always moving; a ticking clock that we all have inside our bodies, which at some point is going to stop. Memory is connected to time. It can take us back and forth through time, enable us to look back and be able to imagine the future.

In the Norwegian author Linn Ullman's book *De oroliga (The worried)* she writes about her upbringing, but also the sorrow of seeing one's dad disappearing into his last chapter in life and see him vanish in front of her eyes. Time, which is coming to an end. She begins her book with the sentences "To see, to remember, to understand. Everything depends on where you stand".¹



Image 1. Emelie Liljebäck, Drawing on my grandmother's hallway. 2017

I am standing in my grandmother's house, having a hard time to get out. I do not know why. Something is here that I have not seen yet. I go through the house and remember things that have happened, the good with the bad. I recognize every smell in every room. It is in the rooms, the objects and the concrete that memories are entangled.²

Time is reflected in the objects around us and we are reflected in them. They stand there until we decide to use them, waiting like someone waiting for their shift to begin. It is also what makes them invisible; they are always there for us, like a dear old friend.³ The objects around us are there to help us remember, or remind us of something that has happened. The Swedish authors Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren writes about the artist Michael Landy, and how he, during a project labels everything he owns and then exhibits and destroys it in a department store in London. It is a comment on the consumerist society, but in this process he also becomes aware of how much he owns and how things live their own life in the shadow of our own.⁴

I asked my grandmother what she would bring, if a fire broke out. She answered – the cat. I said – it is already out. She changed her answer to her wallet, - I have all of my important things in my wallet. I got confused. - But what about all the things around you? This for example, I said, and point at a vase, - Who gave you this? - I got it from your father on my 50th birthday, she answered. - This then? I asked, and this goes on for a while. She knows everything about her belongings. Who gave it to her and when, or who she inherited it from and all his cousins. She has a relation to all her things. All. Every little scrap.

"Things are concrete and tangible elements in our existence. Often they remain as cultural layers from earlier periods in one's life. They stand quietly on the bureau or kitchen cabinet, reminiscent of situations, moods, experiences. But their durable unchangeability is of course apparent: they are constantly re-writing, unloading and recharging, and gaining new meaning as life progresses."⁵
(Own translation of quote)

While our objects change history through our lives, they also become something other than

an object. It is no longer just a jacket, just a toy, just a spoon. It has been transformed from anonymous to unique and becomes an important part of our memory and to our own life story.⁶

I am wandering around the house and start thinking about how everything has a beginning and an end. How we find it hard to handle the end, the disappearing.⁷ In everyday life we have time, the loss of time that always is on-going. *Tick tock, tick tock*. But with every second that passes we fill that lost time with experience and we create memories.⁸ What happens in the now, where time is disappearing and in the same time creates to something new? What happens in the presence that becomes the absence, or the other way around?

In the book *När ingenting särskilt händer (The secret world of doing nothing)* the authors Ehn/Löfgren refers to Rebecca Solnit's book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* and how she argues how we often want to highlight the things that comes in to being, not the forgotten or the erased.⁹ Through the forgotten, the lost, the erased becomes a question visible. Can something just disappear or is something else created?¹⁰

When I got married my grandmother asked me why I did not take my husband's surname. - Why should I? I said. - But how should they find you? She said looking at me confused. - Who? I asked. - The ones who are doing the genealogy! She exclaimed. Women have been disappearing for centuries in everyone's history. We have been continuously writing out the grandmothers, the mothers and the daughters.¹¹ On the website "My heritage" I found a part of my grandfathers family tree. I could not see my name in the tree, just my brother's. My mothers name was not there either. We still make women disappear. If this is happening now, how can we find the women of generations ago? We still have big void in women's history.

We have begun to see a change since books such as *En annan historia (Another story)* by Lina Thomsgård (editor), founder of Rättviseförmedlingen. She invited people to write and highlight women. She says it is a book of stories we should remember.¹² We also see Museum of women's history both in Umeå and in Stockholm whose purpose is to highlight women's stories. A lot has happened in just a few years but we have only started scratching the surface.

"What is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness. It becomes taken for granted, as the background that we do not even notice, and which allows objects to stand out or stand apart."¹³

In this project I want to highlight stories and people I do not believe will be acknowledged, those who are taken for granted and have always worked in the background. I see similarities to the quote above with women in history and how others have been able to stand out, as she is the background.

In Sara Ahmed's book *What's the Use?: On the Uses of Use*, she talks about how to practice the word *used* in different ways. When you apply *used* to a body it is still the purpose of how to talk about an object. *Being useful*.¹⁴ I see the similarities to the everyday object and how it is made to be useful and to the woman in the home who has been assigned the same rules as the object. Always having something for your hands is a familiar phrase, and something that has always been true when it comes to women's history.



Private picture

Void/Loneliness/Remembrance

8th September

When my grandfather died, a silence occurred for my grandmother. A loneliness, an emptiness. My grandmother fills a lot of her silence with radio and television, and she told me - "If I didn't have the TV I didn't know what to do. It's like an old friend."

In the Swedish artist Sven Teglund's book *Ensamheten värst (Loneliness worst)*, he has published his mother Siri Johansson's diary together with his own watercolour paintings of his mother's handicraft. The diary and handicraft becomes one, a story of time. A time filled with emptiness. On each page there are daily stories about weather, visits and sometimes that she feels lonely.¹⁵ I have asked my grandmother if she wants to write a diary, but she do not think she has anything to tell.

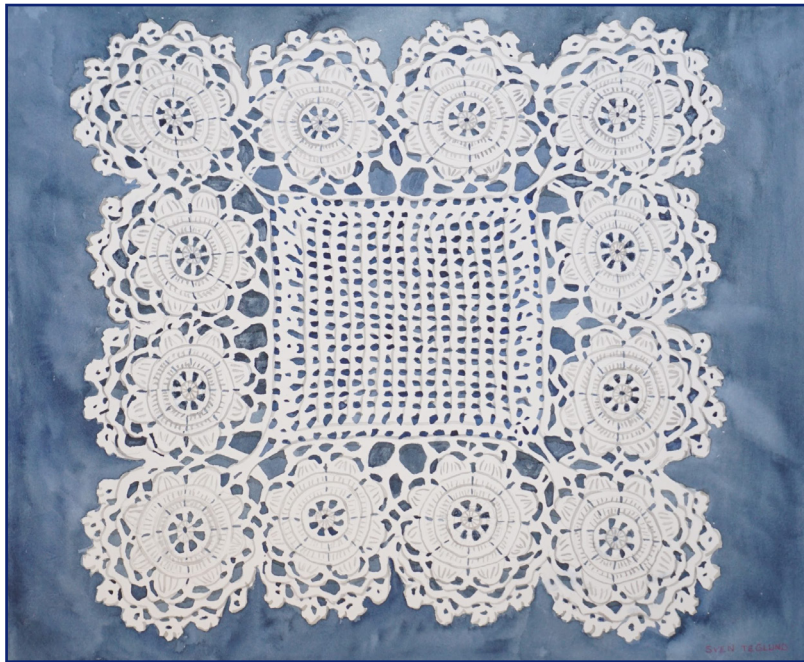


Image 2. Sven Teglund, *Fyrkantig duk med blå bakgrund* 50x60 cm, 2016

Teglund, together with Kristina Sandberg, Swedish author of the trilogy about *Maj*, has the podcast "*Hemmafru*" (*Housewife*) where they talk about the fictional housewife Maj and Teglund's mother Siri on various topics. They talk about their own lives and how they both have been affected by cancer. Teglund talks about the fact that when hope disappeared for a while, then the present disappeared as well, the present became meaningless. He connects the present with the future.¹⁶ Before my grandfather died, grandmother often said that they were sitting in the waiting room of death. Is this what Teglund is talking about? A void reminiscent of everything that was there before, and there you sit and wait.¹⁷

When someone passes, it becomes silent. The absent becomes present in all the things that surround you. It recreates existence after the void created by loss.¹⁸ The present also becomes absent. Something will never be as it was before.

20th December

The silence is compact in the house, but the memories are overflowing. In every little box or casket there are layers of memories that want to remind you of what has been. Belongings that has been collected and saved. Drawings made by my father long time ago, old fabrics, porcelain figures and books. Photographs, letters and important papers. My grandfather's office is intact, even though he passed away several years ago. The silver cutlery is polished in the cabinet, well laid down in its drawers. At the bottom drawer are all of grandmother's jewellery boxes, and in them we find jewellery that carries our families stories, well hidden.

The things around us reflect who we are and help us remember. Like a museum, a memorial that holds all the memories we have with the objects around us, or the person to which they belonged. It is not until the objects have been left untouched for a while, they become visible to us in another way.¹⁹

In the book *Evocative Objects - Things we think with* I read Susann Pollak's text about how her inherited rolling pin takes her back to her grandmother's kitchen and how important the

rolling pin was to her when her grandmother past away. She says that:

“..the evocative objects is transitional in the fullest sense of the word – it can bring together generations, anchor memory and feeling, and evoke attachments that have long been forgotten.”²⁰

She also claims that an evocative object contains more than memory; it helps to heal in a time of grief.²¹ Maybe that is why the objects are important to us, and becomes important when someone is no longer here.

From the beginning of history we were collectors or hunters. Collecting is important for preserving a cultural heritage and to understand our history. There is still a collecting and hunting behaviour, as it has been a part of our heritage for thousands of years.²² Through a collecting of objects we create a whole, an identity.²³ Our everyday objects become representations of ourselves, and unlike the public room we can decide which objects we want to live with, move around, in the domestic sphere.²⁴

In *Evocative Objects - Things we think with* I also read that everyday objects have started to receive the attention that they deserve. There has been a resistance when studying objects that it is often disparaged to hobbyism.²⁵ I see similarities between these thoughts about everyday objects and the woman I am talking about and her always on-going work that many have looked down on in history. The unpaid work, which has been so apparent. Hierarchies become visible here.

In the Swedish artist Petra Hultman's art piece *Needlework, Mary Hultman - Woodwork, Hilding Hultman - Artwork, Petra Hultman*, I see an archive of time, an archive of work that is displayed. Careful folded, to show what has been. It lies in the silent language and talks to me, touches me deeply, this work that has been so sensibly handled.

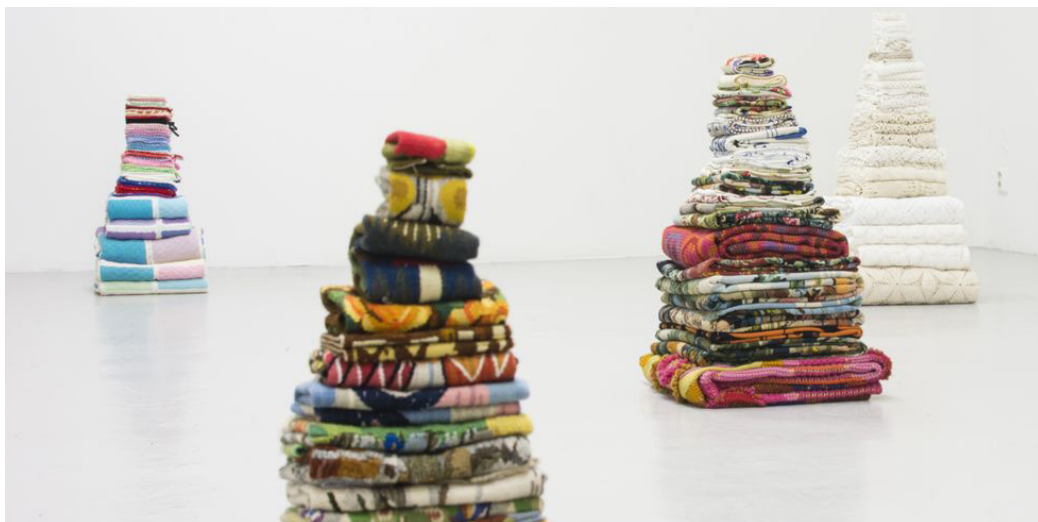


Image 3. Petra Hultman, Needlework, Mary Hultman - Woodwork, Hilding Hultman - Artwork, Petra Hultman, 2016

I can see a sisterhood between us, we who want to show what has been, as cautiously it has been done and as important as it is. But I have not asked her, so I do not know how she looks upon it. Either way we have many common meeting points. I think it is nice to see a fellow artist that also recognize the importance to remember those who have worked in silence and have not been able to take space.



Private picture

Silence/Stories matter/Around the kitchen table

15th November

When I visited my grandmother before Christmas 2017 I talked to her about my work. About how I want to highlight stories that not had the ability to take space and that I've always heard what grandfather did, but not her stories. She nods in recognition and we talk about the past, how women weren't heard as men. - I'm afraid you'll disappear grandmother, and all your stories with you, I said. Because she is like a memory bank, with so many stories. Many who have been passed on through generations, many that people can recognize and many that no one have heard before.

Silence is central in the history of women.²⁶ In Rebecca Solnit's book *Alla frågors moder* (*Mother of all questions*) she writes that we should listen to the ones who got silenced from the past and I agree with her.²⁷ I think about my grandmother's generation, how they soon will no longer be with us, and how a lot of these women had no voice outside the home. There are countless examples in women's history and other exposed groups where people have been silenced. Also in fiction this is clear. One example is *The Little Mermaid*, a story I grew up with; the story about Ariel who exchanged her voice for a life on land. As she rises to land by feet she is happy and embraces her prince but she cannot any longer, and should not, speak for her own.²⁸

Thanks to the feminist movement a lot of silences has been broken, but it will take time to break them all. As this silence has been implemented to all the structures in society for women we have a hard work ahead of us, including regulating laws, politics but also to the smallest things in the everyday.²⁹ To begin to tell and break silences is partly to free oneself. Solnit writes that a person who has a value lives in a society where there is room for her story.³⁰ There is no room for everyone in our society today. We have to look back to have a future, and an identification with the past is needed to see our loss of narrative and stories.³¹ As written before, we have work ahead.

"The house was a small place inside a bigger, or a small story inside a greater"³²
(Own translation of quote)

It is the words that bind us together; it is the stories that are told that creates the roots of a tree.³³ I think about all the stories that is part of our history, but not have been acknowledged in our history books. This oral history soon will be too late to hear, as the storyteller will soon leave this life, or have left it already. How do we preserve a smaller story and make it part of the greater?

We often gathered around a kitchen table, the person I interviewed and me. In this project I have talked to women and men between 8 years - 84 years. In the conversation I had with them I asked about their grandmothers, their great grandmothers and about the generation before that, if they knew who it was and if they wanted to tell me about them. I also asked if they would say that they could relate the grandmothers to the kitchen.

Every person I interviewed could talk about the grandmothers; many knew the names of one or some of the great grandmothers. Two persons knew the name of a great great grandmother, but not the story about them. The first one had made genealogy and knew about the family that way. The other one thought it was because her great great grandmother had lived in the same house that her grandfather later lived in, therefore fragments of her remained, photographs of her was preserved.

When I asked if they could relate any of the grandmothers to the kitchen, everyone could, even the 8 year old. This association is a clear example of how these structures have been maintained and continue to exist in the present day.

PRACTICE

/ METHOD



Private picture

Memorial spaces/Domestic space as a memorial

Memorials are often created to remind us of something that happened in the past. In earlier days, memorials mostly portrayed success and glory in some way, for example a statue of a king winning a war, but today they are also created to reflect upon other events such as disasters, human defeat and other traumas.³⁴ One contemporary example is the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin that I visited 2017. The memorial space is 19000 square meters big and consists of large concrete blocks in different height, placed in a grid. The different heights affected me a lot when walking around in the space, as it directs the light and the darkness. The further in the centre, the darker it got and the surrounding noise and sky disappeared. I felt alone and hurried back to the light, the sound and the feeling of safety.



Image 4. Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, Private photo

Another type of memorial site can be seen in Doris Salcedo's work *"Untitled"* where she works with a reminder of the civil war in Colombia. In this work, she uses domestic furniture and clothing that lacks its user. The concrete that fills the cabinets, tables and clothes makes it no longer usable. The user becomes present in its absence. Doris explains that it is a personal grief but also a public memory.³⁵

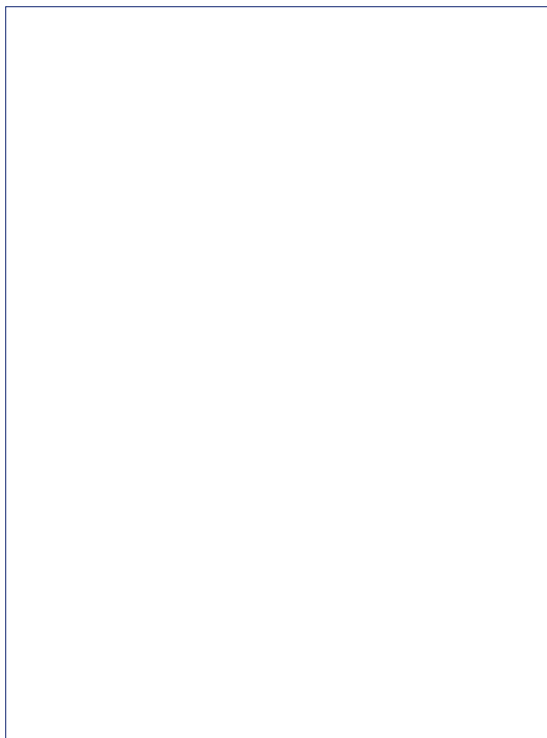


Image 5. Doris Salcedo, *Untitled*, 1995

A memorial is a place where we are allowed to consider and contemplate, to heal, to find comfort, to mourn. We are given a space to take time and be in the moment yet in the past.

I find the memorial site a very interesting place. What we have chosen or choose to show on a memorial reflects what we value. The memorial is also filled with rituals and reflects community structures, different cultures and religious views.³⁶ A memorial can be everything

that is a reminder of a person, place or event we want to remember. It can be private or public.³⁷

“Mementoes, memorials, words and artefacts can be understood as external cultural forms functioning to sustain thoughts and images that are conceived of as part of the internal states of living persons.”³⁸

Historically we have, in different ways, had objects as some sort of memorial site. In the nineteenth century it was common to make jewellery or small paintings of the deceased's hair, to remember and to have the person close.³⁹ It was also common to take a photo of the dead body and then hang the framed photo on the wall of the dining room. A way to preserve the memory of the deceased for generations.⁴⁰

My grandmother lights a candle in front of a photo of my grandfather every day. She has taken over his armchair in front of the TV and the photo is on the table he used to use for his glass of whiskey. Now hers is standing there instead, and the photo of my grandfather. She says that it feels a little better to light that candle, and that he is there in some way. It is some sort of consolation.

This type of ritual is common, to go and light a candle at our relatives' resting place. To remember them and not let them fall into oblivion. Unlike our everyday rituals, the ones we do not really think about doing because it has become a habit, the ritual around a memorial place becomes a ceremony.⁴¹ These two rituals are repetitive, but the ritual on a memorial site is often collective and always done with a meaning.⁴²

I see the domestic space already as some sort of a memorial space. A place where we are surrounded by objects that makes us remember. When I think of my project, to find the present of the absent, I think of the woman I am talking about. A woman who is always present in the home, but absent in history. Here, I want to give her a place.



Private picture

The house/The room/The walls

My grandmother has lived in the house they built for almost sixty years. I have moved over twenty times in my lifetime. Yet we have the same relationship to the objects around us, those that are the building blocks for building a house, a home. The home, where our roots are, where the thoughts of childhood are, where security hopefully is.⁴³ Our objects build our home, objects that we have chosen to have around us, objects that create our identity.⁴⁴ With the objects we create routines and those routines also creates a home. Silent agreements on how to do in a specific home, but also with repetitive patterns, such as how the morning routine is, how we sit around the dining table or move in a kitchen.⁴⁵

"The insignificant and routine is often associated with the home and a traditionally female sphere. But it is an ideological mix that contributes to the woman's subordination. Just as in the description of the farmer's division of labour, the feminisation of routines becomes a tool for the downgrading of certain activities and skills."⁴⁶
(Own translation of quote)

The word *routine* comes from the French word *path*. To make a new path is difficult. Routines are created, often unconsciously, by repetition. In the end, it becomes a habit, a security no matter what routine we have created.⁴⁷

You work with repetition when making traditionally corpus. Making an object, a hollowware, with an inside and outside from a silver sheet takes many hours of repetitive work. The repetitive work here become noted and elevated unlike the repetitive work in the home. Perhaps because this repetitive work often was performed by men, a guild that passed from generation to generation. What I know for sure is that my grandmothers guild; the work of the home, was not.



Image 6. Corpus from 1611



Image 7. *Presenterfat* Corpus from 1698

When I discuss corpus, I do so by showing hierarchies and inequalities. The corpus tradition moves in other homes, other rooms, surrounded by walls other than the ones I talk about in my project. At the height of the Swedish Empire, during the 17th century otherwise known as the 'Great Era' corpus only existed for the outermost top layer in Sweden. Corpus was for those who had money; the church, the nobility, the royal house and were made of materials that could not be owned by everyone, such as silver and other precious material.⁴⁸ This has changed. My grandmother and grandfather owned corpus, like most homes at that time. The corpus is well enclosed in the glass cabinet in the dining room, the silver cutlery well polished. There they are, waiting to be used only at the very finest of occasions, if even then. Traditionally corpus is interconnected with power.⁴⁹ During the great era, some corpus objects were made without a utility function, for example *Presenterfat*. The function was instead to be impressed by, to behold.⁵⁰

In the homes of the working class that eventually got a dining room, corpus was something to reflect yourself in, to show up a facade, something to shape yourself in, though you will never fill the mould.

I want to move my corpus pieces from the dining room into the kitchen. A place where hierarchies always have been redistributed. A place where the woman rules, where she has a voice, where she decides. Here, I want to make her visible.

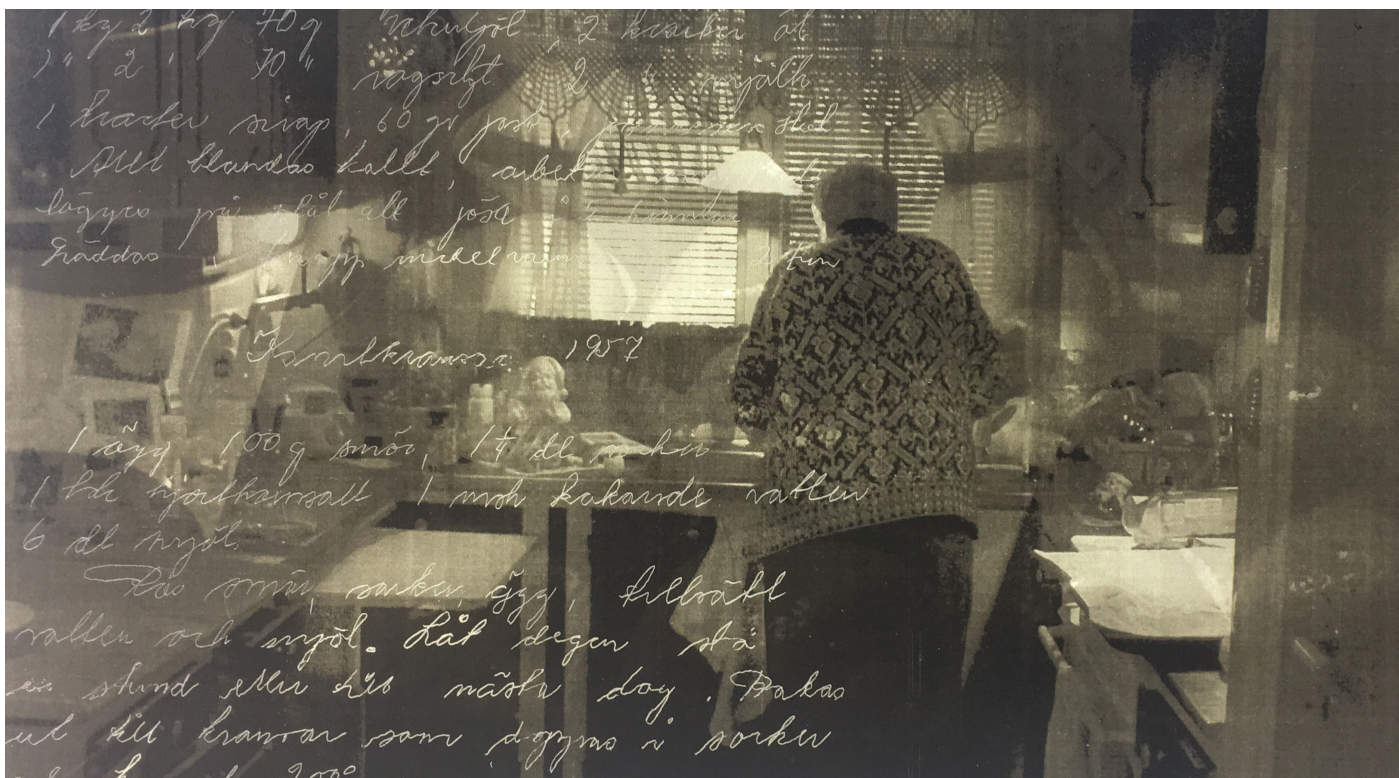


Image 8. Emelie Liljebäck, Grandmother's kitchen, 2018

Recipe/Mould/Pattern

In my artistic project I preserve, take care of and nourish. My process of collecting materials is on-going. I take care of the materials and let them, together with their history, tell a new story. The materials I collect are essential to my project. This process of collecting takes time and has to be allowed take time. The materials may be physical, such as cloth or utensils etc., but also words, stories and thoughts. My physical materials come from second hand stores, where they no longer have an owner but are waiting for a function and to be of use; a memorial in some way. I have also received gifts from people, which belonged to their relatives, those who are no longer among us or are about to leave this world. These layers of narrative are important to my artistic project, as I want to stay as true as I can to the story I am telling.

The act of collecting, the materials and the storytelling are three of my most important methods when working within my artistic practise. They are intertwined with each other and cannot work without the other.

The window

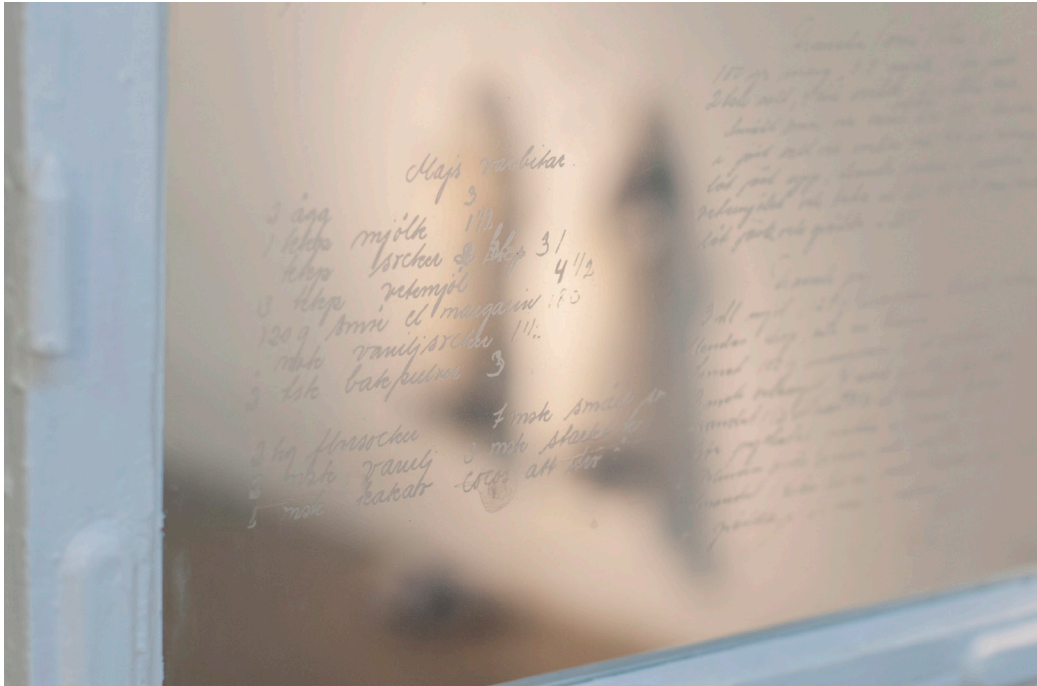


Image 9. Emelie Liljebäck, The window (detail picture), 2020

There is a window over the sink in my grandmother's kitchen, she sees the world outside every time she bakes, washes the dishes, cooks or preserves food. The tradition of this craft is taught between women's hands. That is how I got my knowledge of both handicraft and food. I have learned these skills from the women in the family.

In my grandmother's recipe book I find recipes from other women. Here is a bank of heritage but also a community. You share, thoughtfully, your best recipes so that someone else can use it. Everyone's name is printed among the recipes, so you do not forget someone's kind deed. The recipe book becomes a sisterhood to me, a helping hand from another woman, a loving act. Everyone can relate to a recipe book, everyone can understand its power. The black notebook has begun to collect dust, as my grandmother's hands no longer need the letters in the book. The binder is worn and if you do not know the contents of this book, this treasure will probably be thrown away when she disappears.

I have chosen to show the recipes on a window, to give it space. I want to open up something that has been closed in a shelf for so long, to share it. I have engraved the letters on the window glass to make it everlasting. The light reflects and highlights the words on the glass. You can both look in and out through a window; stand inside or outside. The quaint writing is in some places not readable, but give it some time, give her time. Time may have stood still in this kitchen, but it continues outside.

The kitchen workbench



Image 10. Emelie Liljebäck, *The kitchen workbench* (The detail picture is a video projected on the workbench), 2020

My grandmother's baking machine is standing on the kitchen workbench beside the sink. She has used it since the late sixties, a modernity that allowed her hands to rest, if only for a little while. A repetition in everyday life, sometimes even a requirement. Making food just to feed every mouth in the family. She still bakes regularly, so there are always cookies in the freezer, because how would it look otherwise.

The baking machine's labour is projected on the standardized kitchen workbench from that time. The baking machine goes round and round. It becomes a repetitive pattern of everyday life. Chores that never end for the women's body of the time. *Round and round, on and on.* Even though the repetitive patterns carry the everyday and make it function. *Round and round, on and on.* It does not have an end. According to studies, women spend more than 14 hours on housework each week while men spend about 7 hours.⁵¹ We have come a long way, but it is still clear whose hands are not allowed to rest.

The embroidery pattern

On the wall in my grandmother's kitchen hang embroideries made by her and my great grandmother, big and small. There are various copper vessels on shelves, and copper moulds with patterns; ones that have never been used but hang there on the wall without function. Well polished.

I believe that my grandparent's house is a typical working class home of the time. The well-made embroidery that adorns most homes, but also fills most drawers, forgotten. So much time just tucked away. I see these embroideries as a filling of time but also somehow a caring act to make the home more cosy.⁵² But as my grandmother said, handicraft was a necessary evil that needed to be done. A requirement placed on the woman's body. She would take care of both the home and all who were in it.⁵³



Image 11. Emelie Liljebäck, The embroidery pattern, nr 2025 (One of seven), 2020

The embroidery was made of an embroidery pattern, something to follow, to stay within. Often you got the right colour on the thread with the pattern so there was no opportunity for creativity. I saved my grandmother's embroidery pattern not so long ago, they had gathered in a blue plastic bag, on the way to the trash bin. I cannot help associating the embroidery pattern with a woman's body. Something that is always there, always a support, but never gets recognized. An invisible helping hand that is taken for granted and works in the hidden.

Like the embroidery pattern, the copper is used as some sort of aid. Copper is used as a test model before the traditional copper pieces are made from silver. It has a lower value. For me, the copper has a clear connection to the home and especially the home I am talking about. It also has a clear association to the body I want to highlight and its hierarchy. Therefore, it is important that this material is used. The etching technique is making my piece permanently in contrast to the original embroidery pattern on a paper. I want to give it its right value.

The copper moulds



Image 12. Emelie Liljebäck, *The copper moulds* (detail picture), 2020

In contrast to the embroidery, the copper moulds hang neatly, preferably in a row as a display. A woman's trophy that are polished, on show. For me, the copper moulds are a desire to be something else, something to reflect yourself in, to be shaped by. I talked to a woman who grew up in a middle-class home during the 1950s. She did not have copper moulds on the walls but talked about all the copper vessels in the home. My picture is that the copper moulds were common in the workers' homes that wanted to appear middle class, but failed. Somewhere, we always want to be something or someone else, and we reflect us in the light of something we are not. The status that we thrive after is a standard set by others, a norm that we want to fit in to.⁵⁴

The copper moulds are from different homes with different patina. Some have been intensely polished, others not. But they have never been used for anything other than hanging on a wall. The copper moulds become a representation of many women who together get a common voice. At the same time it mirror itself in the corpus tradition, particularly the corpus object *presenterfat*, something to be impressed by, to behold. And I want us to be impressed by these women who are being represented.

The towels



Image 13. Emelie Liljebäck, *The towels*, 2020

The towel hangs on the hanger in the kitchen; it is used every day and its uses are many. In this kitchen that does not have a dishwasher it is used to dry dishes, but also to dry your hands on and to put over the growing dough. Before the guest arrives the used towel is replaced with a new; a white, mangled towel that is hanged up to display a clean home that is well taken care of.

Paraffin is used for conservation and preservation but also in rituals surrounding grief. With the towel I want to demonstrate the different events from a kitchen where the moments are preserved. The paraffin surrounding the towels is a preservation of a memory of someone and its actions but also a conservation of structures to make them visible. The towels are also important because they so clearly reflect a particular home in a particular time.



Image 14. Emelie Liljebäck, Finding Presence of the Absent, 2020

The room

With my pieces, made of materials that most people recognize, I want to show different layers of history and structures that are invisible to so many. They are present in everything around us. I use the kitchen as a narrative format and my pieces help me tell. With the room I try to create the presence of a person and its objects to make things visible but also show what is happening in the scenery I describe. There is a community here, a relationship between people. There are rituals that are of an importance that makes the everyday work, which we do not want to recognize. Here are also the objects that carry, reflect us, and that make the room visible.⁵⁵ And here she is, which in the everyday is like the joint between the tiles, the invisible helping hand, which is always there. She is here with her story that will soon disappear. Remember her before it is too late. Do not let her disappear into oblivion.

DISCUSSION /
CONCLUSION



Private picture

Lets sit down

I started this investigation with my grandmother, a woman on the countryside who has lived her life like so many others, a woman shaped by the society. I am aware that my grandmother is not every grandmother, but I use my grandmother as a representation of the *Grandmother*. I explore society from a kitchen point of view with a grandmother's life in focus. It is a story about everyday rituals in the home, which are of an important cultural deed. The objects support her in these rituals, and they also help me to tell.

I discuss my grandmother and her generation but I see similarities with today's women where the white mangled cloth and the towels that once showed a clean and nice home are now displayed on Instagram with Rey's filter. The facades and the structures are the same; it is just how we show it that has changed.

Today the occurrence *döstädning* (*Death cleaning*) is getting more and more common in Sweden. *Döstädning* is a term used when someone organise and clear out part of their home just to make it easier for the relatives after their death.⁵⁶ Our objects are important as they reflect who we are and also carry memories of the ones who possessed it. I think there is a risk that a part of the identity and someone's legacy disappear with this occurrence.

I think about memorial spaces in the future, will they also shift to a digital world or do we want to keep going to something that is permanent, somewhere you can sit and contemplate? Maybe Instagram and other social media platforms is already a memorial site with all its content. A memorial that the generation I am talking about is not that familiar with.

My walls

Corpus was a way of showing status in society, but corpus does not have this function anymore. Today we have other ways of showing status. Depending on the home, the status is displayed in different ways and symbols of status change over time.⁵⁷ My grandmother's house has looked the same since they built it, therefore her and grandfather's status markers remain even though it has lost its status.

Today I see a new field in corpus emerging. A field that are border crossing and see materials precious in another way then the traditional field. The silver plate is no longer in focus but rather political and societal questions. I see several master projects from Konstfack in recent years that I relate to. Linda Ottosson's exam project *And slowly poisoning begins to sneak up on you*, is about power structures that I recognize. An alienation just by having a women's body.



Image 15. Linda Ottosson, *And slowly poisoning begins to sneak up on you*, 2018

Lisa Fälts exam work *Reassembling the discarded – corporeal traces*, takes place in various garbage rooms. She collects items from there, saves them from the container. A disposal of materials with the purpose of making these discarded, forgotten objects visible and giving them the value they are worth.



Image 16. Lisa Fält, Reassembling the discarded – Corporeal traces, 2016

I think this emerging field has a hard time to fit in to the corpus field. I experience that there is a desire for a wider field when studying corpus, but I do not feel that reality is that way. I work with material that come from and reflect everyday life, and I work with techniques that carry women's history. I imagine I might have trouble fitting in the field, even if I do so at Konstfack. The corpus field is also shaped by its tradition and it is going to take time for it to change.

I want my pieces to function as a memorial. Existing memorials depict what is perceived as big defining moments of history or people of great importance, but I argue that what I am talking about affects people's lives equally. Everyday life, what we do every day; that shapes a life, a home, a world. Although I claim that my objects create some sort of a memorial, I wonder whether it will differ too much from the traditional ones to be perceived as I wish. This is going to be a major challenge for me; to creating a space that people can experience as a memorial when exhibiting at the spring exhibition.

After washing the dishes

"We must stop telling the story of the woman who sat at home, passive and depending, waiting for her husband. She was busy. She still is."⁵⁸

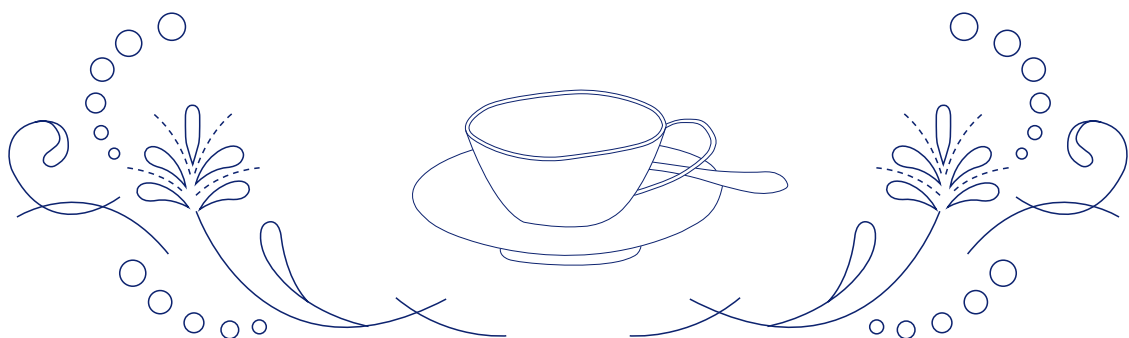
(Own translation of quote)

During this project I have asked myself what my role is. I say that I want to highlight stories that do not have the ability to take space and I question if I really do or can do that. When I talk about my grandmother and her story, I always talk from my perspective. Her perception of it all is of course different than mine. Do I have the right to interpret her story? She does not see a value in her stories, should I take it into account or should I instead see that this structure is hard to breakdown? So what is my role? My conclusion is that I am a storyteller. A storyteller that from my own perspective gives you a story, I cannot do it in another way, but my intention is to be as objective as I can.

I have also asked myself how my work will be received. I am worried that it will be perceived as I am romanticising women's history rather than showing structures and problematizing them. My biggest fear is that this work will be perceived that I am telling the story of the woman sitting at home, passive and depending, when my aim was to show the opposite.

In my investigation of *Finding presence of the absent*, I discovered several things that I saw were absent and made them present. I found the grandmother, a women's body that was always present in the home but absent in history. I found the objects around her that in different ways, in different situations were carriers of both presence and absence. And with this project, I had to ask myself if I could say that I work with corpus. I do not fit in the field, but I squeeze myself in. I then become the presence of the one who is absent.

With my pieces, which create a memorial, I have tried to make her visible in the objects and the scenery that reflect her even though she is not there. I have tried to make her present in her absence.



R E F E R E N C E

L I S T

Notes

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Image 4. Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, my own photograph, taken September 2016.

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Weight: 1493 g. Image from Nationalmuseums collections. Photographer: Olle Andersson. Accessed January 31, 2020 <http://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=99516&viewType=detailView>
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Image 7. Johan Schenck, *Fat med framställning av Juno i mitten*, 1698. Silver, Measurements: (h x l x b) 28,4 x 3,1 x 33,3 cm Weight: 273,9 g. Image from Nationalmuseums collections. Photographer: Erik Cornelius. Accessed February 6, 2020 <http://collection.nationalmuseum.se/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=48&viewType=detailView>
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Image 8. Emelie Liljebäck, *Grandmothers kitchen*. 2018. Photo.

Image 9. Emelie Liljebäck, *The window*, Detail, 2020. Engraved recepies on a window glass.

Image 10. Emelie Liljebäck, *The kitchen workbench*, 2020. Projected movie on a kitchen workbench.

Image 11. Emelie Liljebäck, nr. 2025 (one of seven) *The embroidery pattern*, 2020. Etchings of embroidery patterns.

Image 12. Emelie Liljebäck, Detail picture, *The copper moulds*, 2020

Image 13. Emelie Liljebäck, *The towels*, 2020

Image 14. Emelie Liljebäck, *Finding Presence of the Absent*, 2020

Image 15. Linda Ottosson, *Holiness of Dart*. 2018. Casted lead/tin, dart cabinet. Image from Konstfacks website. Accessed February 6, 2020 <http://www.konstfack2018.se/master/linda-ottosson/>
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Image 16. Lisa Fält, *Untitled*. 2016. Original lamp, pulverized shards. Image from Konstfacks website. Accessed February 6, 2020 <http://www.konstfack2016.se/master/maad/lisa-falt/>
Permission to use image given by Lisa Fält

Unpublished material:

I asked on Facebook if anyone wanted to be interviewed for my exam project. I do not know everyone, but are acquainted with them all. I first started to interview people on the subject "silence" which I thought my subject where at the time. When my subject changed I asked the remaining people if they wanted to be in an interview with other questions, almost everyone wanted to.

It was important that the participant was from both the countryside and the city. It was also important to have a wide age range. The participants are from 8 years – 84 years.

Participants:

Tove. Interview 2019-12-26

Joacim. Interview 2019-12-26

Elsa. Interview 2019-12-29

Moa. Interview 2019-12-29

Oskar. Interview 2019-12-29

Iris. Interview 2020-01-08

Hannes. Interview 2020-02-02

Johan. Interview 2020-02-02

Fanny. Interview 2020-02-02

Anita. Interview 2020-02-12

Marie. Interview 2020-02-13

Ingrid. Interview 2020-02-13



After all

3th May

My grandmother is walking to the local store with her walker early every Tuesday. She is there before it opens. She can hand in a piece of paper at the back of the store, with what she needs, and then a shop assistant purchases it for her, for those who are in a risk group. She says it doesn't bother her that much, this being alone, she is used to it. I hear that she has taken precautions to isolate herself; she doesn't want to die yet. "If I get something I am sure I am not going to make it, I'm so old", she says. It makes me even more afraid to lose her, and now I can't meet her even if I want to.

I will never forget this spring; it became very different from the one I had imagined. Celebrations have been replaced by distance and digital platforms. The spring exhibition that I had been looking forward to for so long became a virtual platform that will be released later and the celebration will be absent. We have had to be flexible, inventive and find other solutions to reach an audience. I think it has been difficult. I do not believe my work function as well as I want in a digital format. I want to meet my audience and not just through a digital platform.

But we have to make the most of a situation that we have never experienced before.

I got a question on my examination from the audience that I want to write about. One question I could not answer because there was no time left. The question was roughly:

Does your grandmother know about your work?

Yes. I could never do this work without her knowledge. It would feel very strange, and dishonest in a way. I stayed with her for a week during my first year at the master's, and during that week we talked a lot and she told me stories I had never heard before. Stories that have had been hidden, at least for me. We talked about how she experienced some choices she had to make because of the gender she has. She thought most of them were reasonable; I would not have thought that if I had to take them today. She is shaped by the society she grew up in and I am shaped by mine. But some things are carried from generation to generation, and I think these things are important to make visible and make it clear what it contains.

Although I use my grandmother's life to explore the field of my questions in this work, it must be remembered that this is also my story. I use my history to make structures visible, but also to show what happen in the kitchen I grew up in. My grandmothers and the mothers before them were the glue that held the family together, as most women of that time. It was never the men.

The main reason I worked with this project is to shed some light on the daily chores of women's bodies for generations. The everyday routines that is so important for everything to work. Which means that everyone else in that family has been able to do what they want because they can come home to food on the table, clean floors and folded laundry. My grandmother never complained about the role given to her. Nor was she a housewife that many may think. She was a workingwoman and took care of the household, dual jobs. But she never complained. She is content with her choices in life. So it is not her story I am telling. I would rather say it is my observations of my history that I am talking about, my legacy. Maybe it is what I want to pass on as a legacy and what I do not want to pass on. Make it visible and talk about it.

But this is also a love-project and a grief that I am processing of my grandmother that will soon disappear. The time that is shrinking and before it ends I want to make her visible so she is not forgotten. Although she is like everyone else. At the end of the first year at the master, I wrote the following question: How do you absorb someone you never want to let go of? Maybe that is what I have tried to do in some way.