



**IN DIALOGUE WITH CLAY**  
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KONSTFACK CRAFT! MA2  
SPRING 2020

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WORD COUNT: 6754

## **Abstract**

This paper is about my relationship to the material clay, and how it has affected my creative process. In this text I argue that clay is a material with human properties. I think of my practice as a dialogue between me and the material, an exchange rather than a monologue. This is how I picture clay as my main partner for discussing the deeper questions of what it is to be human, how clay as material can stand as metaphor for what it is to be living. I argue that clay has the poetic strength to communicate these questions of life of a more existential nature.

Through the argument of clay being a material with human properties, I reason that a practice in materiality is a study of empathy since we spend much time with our materials to fully grasp how they behave. I firmly believe that this world is in need of an empathic movement, and I think that the field of craft has the possibility to be part of that movement. I see practitioners within the field of craft as practitioners of the sometimes irrational, emotional and indescribable parts of life. As researchers of the more existential qualities of life, I believe that we are important voices in a society that is getting more focused on rationality. With some help from writers, practitioners and philosophers within and outside the field of craft, I reason around the following research question:

Can a material based practice stand as lodestar in today's society, to show empathy towards each other as beings as well as our surroundings?

Key Words:

Craft, Practical Knowledge, Materiality, Process, Clay, Clay as Metaphor, Performative Material, The Ephemeral, Transience, Time, Empathy.

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing this essay would not have been as manageable without the valuable support and feedback from my peers, teachers, family and friends.

I want to direct some special thanks:

To my main tutor Matt Smith for all the helpful tutoring over these two years during my master.

To my tutor for the writing of this thesis, Andrea Peach, for support and feedback.

To Birgitta Burling for good discussions about what can be seen in my physical work.

To Mårten Medbo for generously sharing thoughts, texts and discussions around the subject of craft.

To Julia Björkqvist for the thorough proofreading of my paper.

And last but not least: To my biggest support and my hardest critic, Oskar Tufvesson.

Thank you.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>In Dialogue with Clay</b>	<b>p. 5</b>
<b>Why Clay? A Background</b>	<b>p. 6-8</b>
<b>Working Method</b>	<b>p. 10-15</b>
<b>The Field of Craft</b>	<b>p. 16-22</b>
-A Shift of Perspective	p. 20-21
-The Climate in Todays Society and the Need of Non-knowledge	p. 22
<b>The Importance of Art and Craft Practices - Discussion</b>	<b>p. 23</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>p. 24</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>p. 25-27</b>
- Interview with Mårten Medbo	p. 25-26
- Understandings of Not Knowing	p. 27
<b>References</b>	<b>p. 28</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>p. 28-29</b>
<b>Image References</b>	<b>p. 29-30</b>

## In Dialogue with Clay

Malleability and plasticity are two fascinating qualities that clay has, but clay holds a wide range of possibilities. It is shapable yet steady, soft and hard, transient and ever lasting, all this simultaneously depending on which state you encounter it in. If not fired, clay is fragile and you must handle it with care. If you force the clay to dry too fast it cracks, and if you accidentally hit it when wet it remembers your mistake and responds to your action in the firing process.

A practice with clay as main material is a practice where you have to be patient and get to know the material. Sometimes I think of clay as if it were a human being, metaphorically speaking. I have understood that these human qualities of clay were the reason why I chose to work with it in the first place and why I still enjoy it. The material challenges me and I challenge it, it is a dialogue rather than a monologue and I need it to respond to my actions as well as it reacts to mine. This is why I think of clay as a performative material, and why I see it as a working partner (other than simply a material) in my practice. In my work the material has a metaphorical connotation to what it is to be human and together we discuss the fragility of life. If you are asking me, the many presented characteristics of clay gives it the poetic strength and possibility to point at questions of a more existential character. It troubles me that we, in today's society, seem to forget about the bigger questions in life. Other things captures our attention, such as being strong individuals. I believe that by working with materials which demands a lot from the practitioner in terms of patience and knowledge, the craft scene can serve as a platform to address themes such as empathy and existence. I believe this since it is a field in which we practice patience and respect for material as well as towards each other on a daily basis. When knowing our craft properly, we have the possibility to push the boundaries of the material. A material based practice could be viewed as an exercise of respect and care.

This paper is about my relationship with the material clay as well as the general field of craft. I decided to write about this topic since I have the urge to understand what I am doing, why I am doing what I am doing, and how I am doing it. As a craftsperson, the making of things is a big part of our knowledge, which makes it easy to take that knowledge for granted. The intention for this paper is to let the process come to light and to let the importance of the artistic practice in a material based knowledge get the attention I believe it deserves. Throughout this paper I want to follow my steps within the process, when thinking, writing and making. I make, I act and the material responds, which leaves me to answer. I am responding in clay once again, which leaves the material to respond... My work has become a circular process where something that has not happened before occurs and it leads me to the next step, which conveniently enough also is the chain of events in discourse. I do not know what my discussion partner will answer, not if it is in the shape of a person nor a material. This has been my method throughout my practice.

This paper is written with help from a discussion with the Swedish ceramicist Mårten Medbo, the Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark and her book *Det omätbaras renässans*, and the British ceramic artist and writer Alison Britton.

In this paper I want to enlighten and understand my interest in, my relationship to, a process based practice with clay, and how my practice can find a place in a rationalized society. Can a material based practice stand as lodestar in today's society, to show empathy towards each other as beings as well as our surroundings?

## Why Clay? A Background

My studies in the field of craft started at a pre-college course at Nyckelviksskolan, in Stockholm. I was excited about the possibility to spend so many hours of the year with clay since I had gotten taste of it from a general art course at Folkuniversitetet the year before. At Folkuniversitetet I could shape the material clay the way I wanted, there were no restrictions. I instantly knew I wanted to spend more time with it, so I applied for a course in ceramic art at Nyckelviken. Although the ceramic art course had the most amount of hours with clay, it came with do's and don'ts and the freedom I initially felt within the material was long gone. It was replaced by burdensome traditions and expectations of how I should and should not process the material. How it should be built to not explode in the kiln, how the shapes had to be hollow, how the clay had to have just the right wetness to put on more clay when building. When finishing Nyckelviksskolan I thought that clay was not for me, and that created a complicated relationship between me and the field of craft. I did not want to feel restricted in that sense, and I decided to give up. I went to a pre-college course within the field of fine art, Munka Ljungby Konstskola, and I thought that this was my chance to find my way back to the feeling of freedom in art practices.

At Munka Ljungby I got all the possibilities to work with whatever I wanted to - video, performance, painting, graphics, sculpting, photography... but I ended up in the ceramic workshop. It was a relief to be there, practically no one used that workshop since no one wanted to work in ceramics which resulted in me doing whatever I had the feeling of doing. No one could tell me that I used the wrong techniques or that things would break. Many times my sculptures cracked, but many times they did not which resulted in me getting my sense of freedom back. I also realized that all the possibilities to do whatever I wanted to in whatever material I wished blinded me, and that was probably the reason to why I went back to the material familiar to me. I decided that I would give the ceramic art scene another shot. Obviously I was compelled to stay with clay, and the restriction of staying loyal to one material made it easier for me to not feel intimidated by possibilities - I had some rules to play by.

In the beginning of my bachelor studies at HDK I worked figuratively, and I was introduced to a broader understanding of the different things that craft could be - it did not have to be coiled pots, animals and enlarged vegetables made of clay - it could be all different kinds of things. In my second year I was introduced to the British ceramic artist Clare Twomey which opened up for a whole new understanding and reading of craft to me. The first work of Clare Twomey I came in contact with was her piece *Consciousness/conscience*. The piece consists of thousands of unfired hollow tiles made in bone china, and the concept of the work was to address thoughts around human interaction, social convention and appropriateness (Twomey, 2020). With some help from this piece I realized that traditions did not have to be a burden, it could also be an asset. I found Clares work so brilliant because of her elements of surprise - floor tiles are not supposed to break, that is not how they usually behave, and that behavior was the result of unfired clay. What Clare Twomey did was that she - through her work - explained to me how to stay grounded within tradition to be able to challenge it. I started to work with unfired clay and I wanted to discuss ideas around function rather than making functional objects.

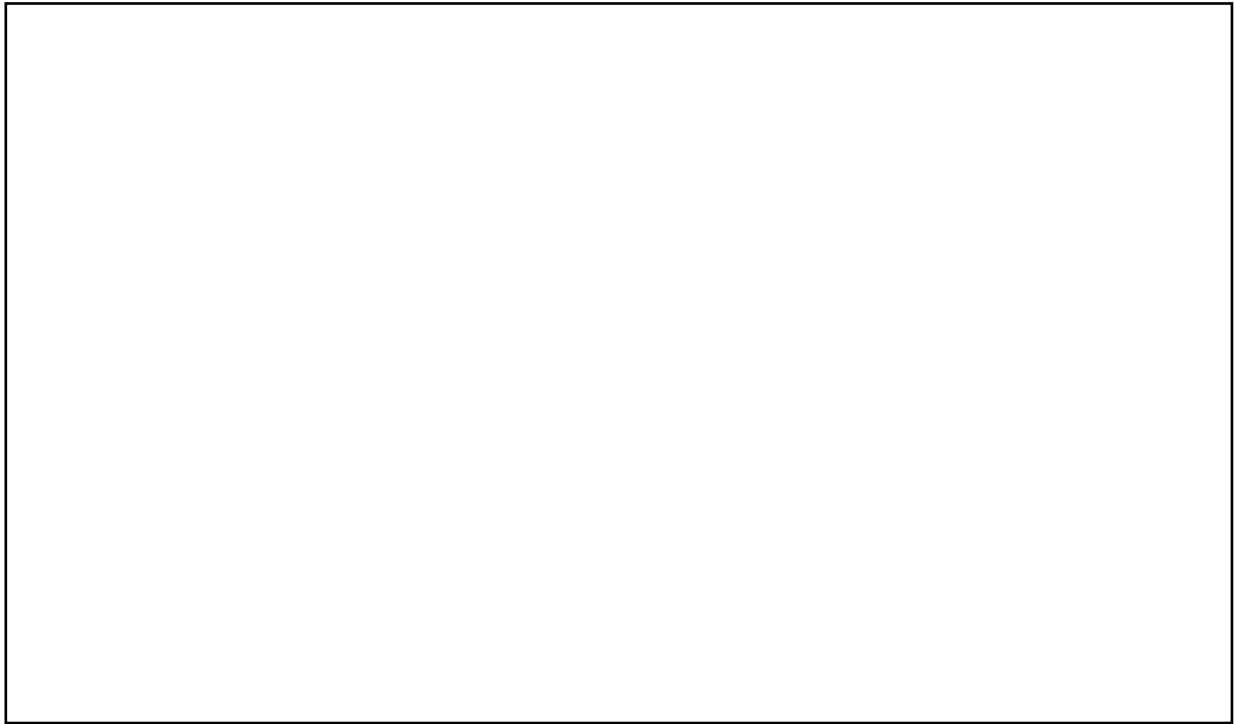


Figure 1, Photo of Clare Twomey's work *Consciousness/Conscience*. 2001-2004.

The first piece I made of this theme is a video work with the title *Dysfunctional Functionality*, and it has been one of my most important works since it opened up for a new way of working. It was made for a course of how to make functional objects and during the examination we were supposed to show one pot to pour out from and one cup to drink out of when examined, to see how the function of the objects worked. Instead of this, I showed a video of 15 minutes and presented the objects used when making the video, as a way to discuss what function actually is, and how it differs depending on how the objects were meant to act or behave. Since the making of functional objects were no part of my personal interest, this was a way for me to pass the course but still being true to my interests within the ceramic field. I also wanted the video piece to speak about the fragility of life, how a ceramic object dissolving over time could communicate thoughts around life and death. This theme, both method of working and what I want to address, have more or less followed me ever since.





Figure 2, Still image from video *Dysfunctional Functionality* Length: 15:51

2014



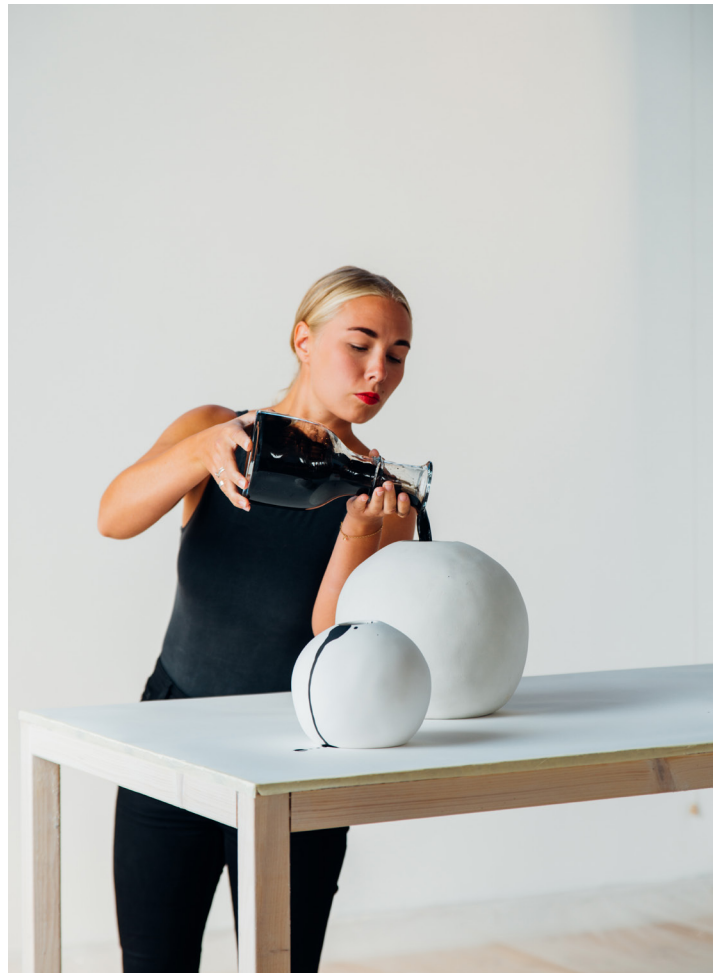


Fig. 3,4,5. Documentation from the performance *When Time Becomes Form - A Still Life* presented at Konsthallen Lokstallet in Strömstad august 2018. Photos: Sofie Blumenthal



Fig. 6, Documentation from the performance *When Time Becomes Form - A Still Life* presented at Konsthallen Lokstallet in Strömstad august 2018. Photo: Sofie Blumenthal

## Working Method

As a method in my practice I have been working with clay as my main partner to discuss the fragility of life. I have been shaping clay to let it respond to me in different ways. As an example I will present the piece *When Time Becomes form - A Still Life*, which I have (as earlier mentioned) used as a starting point for my master project. (Four documentation images of the piece is presented above).

For the performance I have been working with the shape of a vessel which I use as tools to create pictures. The vessels are coiled, which is a ceramic technique commonly used to create hollow ceramic shapes such as a vessel or a pot. The performance consists of a set of unfired vessels on a podium, another podium with water bottles, ink and me. During the performance I color the water in the water bottles with the ink and pour the black liquid into the unfired vessels. After this I wait together with the viewers. It takes around 15 minutes before anything happens, but eventually the vessels start to crack caused by the materials strong desire to return to its plastic state - the clay sucks the water which creates tensions, eventually the black ink leaks out of the vessels onto a paper.

I see this as a way for the material to respond to my action where I activate the vessels, and it leaves me with an imprint of the ink passing through the vessel. My tools, the vessels, leaves me to respond to the imprint they made. The imprint is what I have decided to work with for my masters project. This is where I start to think of clay as a partner for discussing the deeper questions of what it is to be human, how the clay as material can stand as metaphor for what it is to be living. I think of the process, the decaying of the vessels, the imprint they make, as a process of life and death. It has something to do with the fragility of life, how vulnerable it is and how vulnerable we



are as beings.

The theme of transience, things that change over time, has been with me since I started my artistic practice. The same year as I started studying art my grandmother got ill, and she was the first person close to me to pass away, my first grief. I had a hard time understanding how something could be one minute to suddenly change in the next. In the beginning I worked with this of a therapeutic reason, but when presenting it for an audience I realized that the readings amongst the viewers were similar to my intention of the piece, something I found incredibly interesting. What is it in this process that speaks so loudly about life and death? Can that stand as evidence for my thoughts of clay as a metaphor to life, or is it rather the actual happening that is communicative?

The last semester of my first year in the master program I started to build sculptures after the paintings that the leaking vessels created. I view the imprint of the ink (throughout this text I will refer to the imprints of the ink as paintings) as a model to sculpt after.

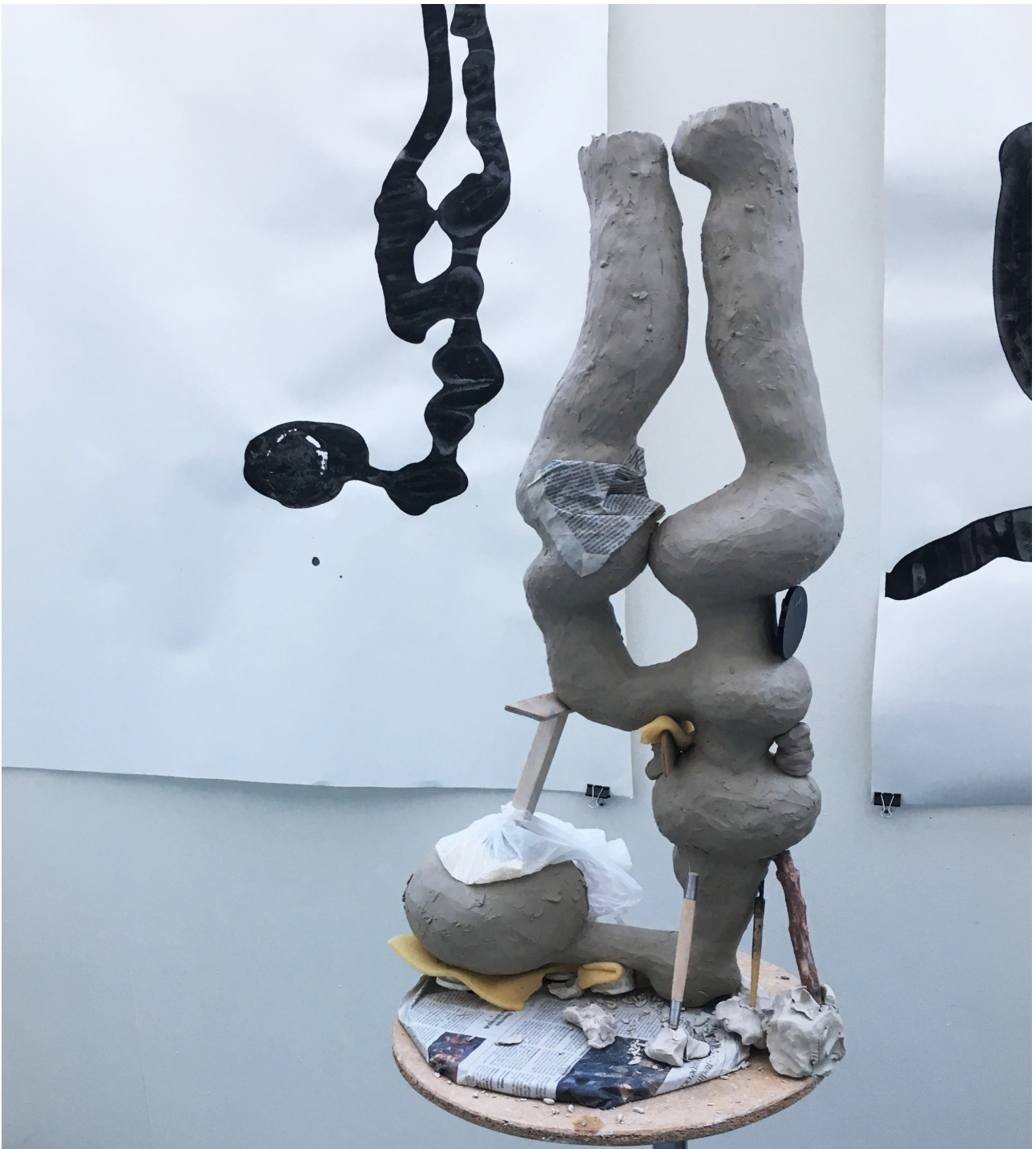


Fig. 7 sculpture in process 2019

Through this way of working, with clear rules of how the outcome should be, I found joy in the process. It was a liberating way for me to work since I had a two dimensional evidence of how the sculpture would look in the end, but the freedom to decide what it should look like three dimensionally. The sculpting is not easy. Since I am loyal to my ceramic techniques all the sculptures are coiled and I have to make small tools to support the sculptures to not fall when making them. Besides the problems of gravity and all that comes with it, it is also a moment in my making when I have to be completely present. In this sense, the making of the sculptures and the making of the vessels are two completely different states of mind, two completely different ways of processing the material.

When coiling the vessels, the knowledge lies in my hands since I have made over a hundred of them, it almost feels autonomous. Preparing for a performance is because of this a meditative state of mind. When building the sculptures on the other hand I have to make conscious decisions. Decisions of what the sculpture will look like, if it is similar to the painting or not and whether it works or not. I also have to be empathic of what the material accepts, how much I can push it without breaking its boundaries. In a meeting with the Swedish ceramicist and doctor in the field of craft, Mårten Medbo, we discussed our experiences of making and its different states. The following citation is not an exact quote, but rather a translation from my memory and notes from the discussion. With Medbo:

*"The experience of making has meaning in itself. It is a moment when I can spend time in another mental state which is hard to find at other places than by the wheel. In the making, when I throw, I can find a place in this world free from anxiety. If I find a certain situation or moment of life exhausting I spend some time throwing, and it works! It lies in the hands, I am not aware of what I am doing in that specific moment - the clay kind of makes itself, and it gives me a sense of relief. Although, there are different states in the process. For instance I can wheel throw 1000 balls in clay, and that makes itself. It is when I am putting the balls together as a sculpture that I have to be really present in the making of it, to use my critical eyes and make conscious decisions".* (Medbo. 2020)

I very much recognize this in my own practice. Even though we use different techniques, I have similar experiences. What I believe Medbo describes is a difference in the sense of being present or absent that differs depending on what you are doing. These two states of mind when working does utterly different things to us, yet both of them are equally important.

When I am coiling the sculptures the circumstances has to be in a certain way. I cannot be too tired because then I am out of energy which makes it hard to critically observe the translation from the painting to the sculpture. I cannot start too late in the afternoon and I have to keep focus. A flaw in the fundament of the sculpture can have fatal consequences, it gives the sculpture weird perspectives and the translation might not work. In the same way as when making the sculptures I process the paintings. How I decide to place the vessels affects the final result of the painting, the placing of them is time consuming and a conscious state of mind. For the performance I activate all the vessels simultaneously, but when working with a painting "off stage" (see picture below) I activate them one by one, to be able to see the flow of the ink, and thereby the rhythm of the painting. In this sense, I move into the field of painting. I will not discuss the fact that I am moving between the borders of painting and ceramics further in this paper, but it is interesting and I might discuss this in the future.





Fig. 8 Work in progress 2019

The sculptures I am making are quite different in expression when being compared to the performance, although they are clearly linked due to how they are made. The performance speaks about the ephemeral as earlier mentioned, but the sculptures are objects of a frozen moment. When thinking of the performance as a metaphor to life and death, it is not improper to think about the sculptures as monuments or headstones of something that occurred in a time that passed, which is what gave the continuation of the *When Time Becomes Form* project its title: *When Time Becomes Form - The Monuments*. Aesthetically, the sculptures have directions in a room - they move differently and are therefore speaking about different kinds of flow. This is something I work with when making installations with the sculptures and paintings for exhibition. I have also started to add an element of light and shadows for the installations since I think that it increases the feeling of figures, which is something I find interesting and a substantial part of the installation.

I want to briefly mention the glazes I have chosen to work with since the glazes have been important for the final result of the sculptures. I spent a large amount of hours in the glaze lab during my first year at Konstfack. From those hours I found three glazes that I thought communicated the origin of the sculptures, that they are inspired by clay and ink. The three glazes chosen are three classical high firing glazes, which I find interesting because of the fact that they refer to a very strong ceramic tradition from which I tried to escape in the beginning of my studies. This escape and my thoughts around it will be deeper discussed in the section *A Shift of Perspective*.

In this chapter I have presented my method of working. To sum it up, my method is that I create paintings with my tools - the unfired vessels - which I activate with water and ink. The vessels are during a performance filled with water and ink which makes the vessels crack, the colored water leaks onto a paper and creates pictures which I refer to as paintings. I use the paintings as models or sketches for sculptures. The sculptures are glaze fired and when in an exhibition setting, I cre-

ate installations with the sculptures and light. In the next chapter i want to put my work in context and discuss why it is relevant for me and my work to be positioned in the field of craft.



Fig. 9 Documentation photo of installation from Exhibition FLUKE at Galleri Rostrum Malmö 2020



Fig. 10, 11 Installation view of sculptures, painting and light.  
Exhibition FLUKE at Galleri Rostrum Malmö 2020

Photos: Johan Söderström



## The Field of Craft

Having reflected on my methods, I now want to discuss how and why I position my work within the field of craft. I believe that the field has been important for me since it strongly influenced the way I work, from the start until now. The fact that I wanted to get rid of everything that had to do with traditions within the ceramic field is what makes this interesting. As mentioned, I wanted to step away from everything I thought was connected to tradition, and then further on started to work with tradition by questioning it - and now am closer to a traditional way of processing clay even though I consider myself operating somewhere on the blurry line of art and craft.

This chapter is divided into two sections. First I reason about my relationship to the material as well as the field of craft and art, to later go into the section I call *A shift of perspective*. In that section I elaborate on how my understanding of the craft scene has changed over the years and how that has shifted my approach to it. After that I introduce the section I call *The Climate of Today's Society and the Importance of Craft Practices*, where I discuss in what way the craft scene can be a practice with an empathic approach to life. With some help from the Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark I will discuss the importance of art and craft in today's society, to question and highlight what is not covered in research of a more "scientific" nature. That art and craft scenes can be places to discuss the more existential questions of life, and not necessarily come with any answers but rather operate as observers. That the things we do not know are equally important as the things we do know, that we should argue for the importance of our existence as practitioners in art professions - this is where I believe that the field of craft can lead the way.

As earlier mentioned, I have since the beginning of my studies in an artistic practice been enchanted by clay. I was captured by the material in my hands - how it felt, the weight of it, what it looked like, how it could be shaped and all the possibilities that came with it. My love for clay led me to study ceramic art because that gave me the most amount of hours with the material I could possibly have. Although I was pleased with the amount of hours to spend with clay, I realized that a ceramicists way of handling clay is remarkably different from how a sculptor is dealing with it. The fine art way of using clay was my first encounter with the material, and I was intrigued by it because of the freedom I felt when using it. In the dissertation of the Swedish ceramicist and doctor Mårten Medbo, he writes: (Own translation)

*"It is presumably easier to see the artistic potential within the negative load that comes with (some) ceramic methods and materials, if standing outside of the context where the methods have been produced". (Medbo. 2016, p.72)*

What Medbo describes is a difference in how to approach clay depending on in which field you are practicing. The strain that can be experienced within a ceramic tradition that Medbo mentions is something that I experienced as a burden throughout my first years while studying ceramics. When working with the ceramic techniques my point of focus shifted from being enchanted by the freedom in the material to be burdened by expectations and understandings of how things should be done. Because of this, my interest changed. I started to think of the importance of a piece not containing cracks, having a function or making the clay to do what I wanted it to rather than focusing on forms and a more intuitive approach to sculpting.

Further on in Medbo's dissertation he describes the work of the Swedish artist Klara Kristalova and how she managed to showcase qualities in clay that he had not experienced earlier and the reasons that it might be because of Kristalova's background in the fine art tradition and not the ceramic tradition. He argues that it might be easier to see the artistic qualities that clay has if not constrained by traditions. (Medbo 2016, 72)

Glenn Adamson wrote a text about the ceramic artist Peter Voulkos presented in his book *Thinking Through Craft*. Voulkos seems to have similar understandings of how the tradition affects the way you handle clay. The thought is probably similar to Medbo's, but it differs quite much in practice. Voulkos had the intention to be a potter who made ceramics as a sculptor. His expressionist work has been seen as a liberating violence done to pottery (Adamson 2007, p.44).

In a meeting with Medbo we discussed whether it is possible for a craftsperson to "forget" her/his skills. Medbo argued that it is hard to forget about a knowledge that to a wide extent is placed within your hands, and that is something he thinks is impossible to get rid of. The knowledge of craft cannot be forgotten about since it is there whether the practitioner wants it to or not. This is how I read Voulkos's works - that his intention was to get rid of his craft knowledge by consciously deciding to stop caring about the conventions of how to process clay.

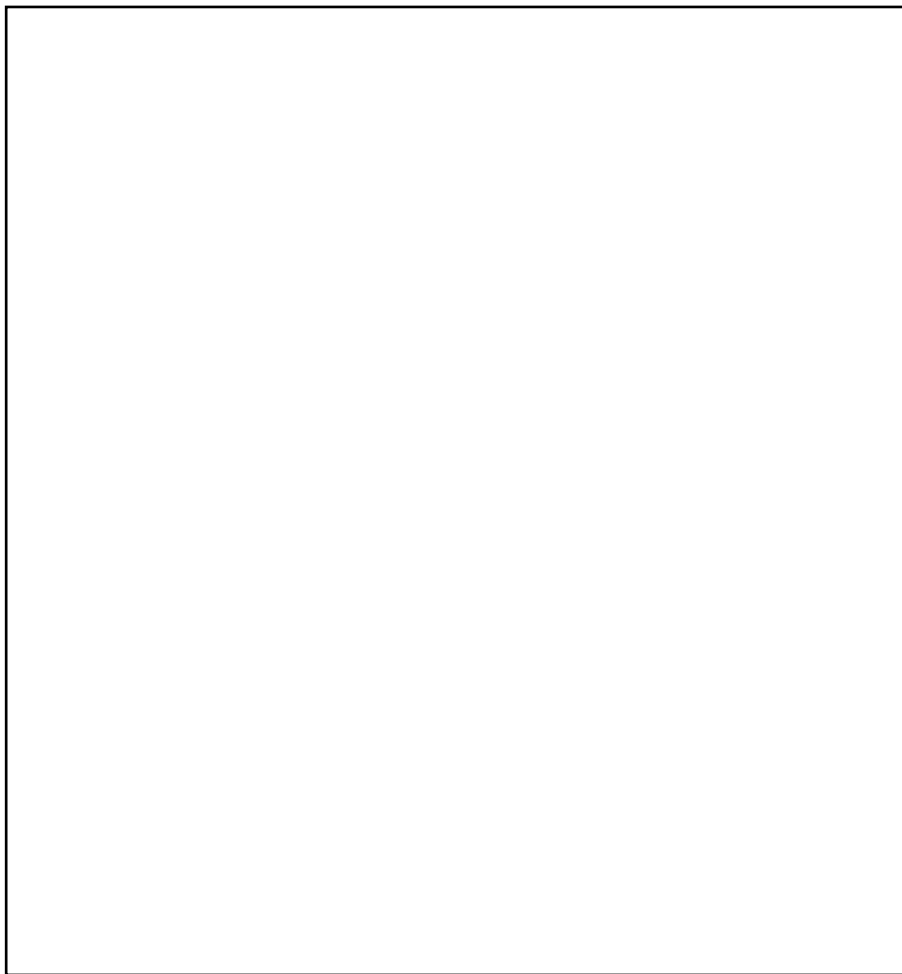


Fig. 12 Photo of Peter Voulkos making an untitled sculpture. 1956.

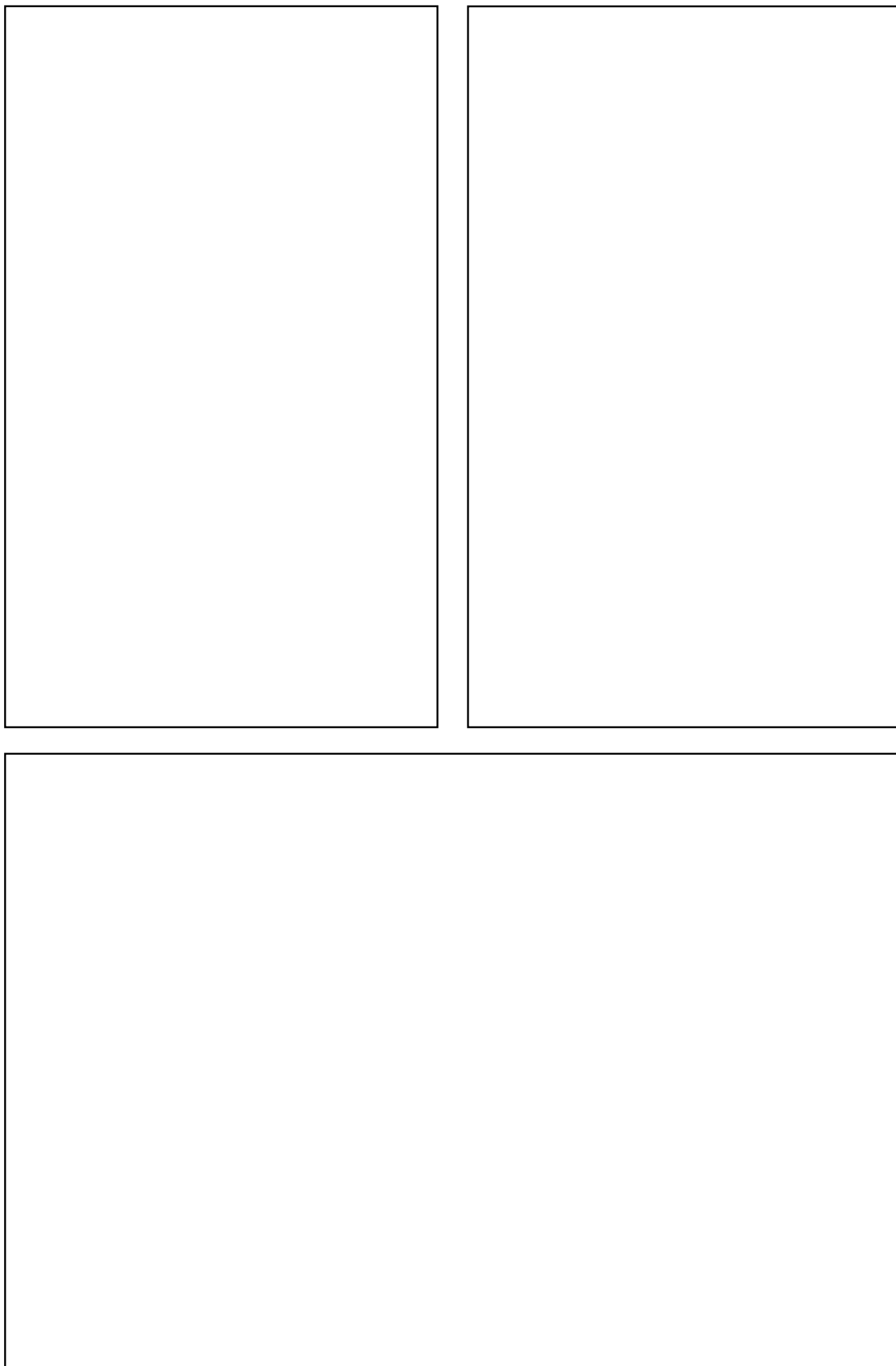


Fig 13, 14, 15, Mårten Medbo. *Homo Capax*. 2013.

Throughout my studies I realized that the expectation of being a qualified crafter I had on me, to learn how to handle my material "correctly", was suffocating. I had to find my own way to find a more communicative relationship to the material. My way to deal with that issue has been to work with unfired ceramics to enter a new way of approaching clay. This action came to be more important to me than I understood at the time. It has not only affected how the red thread in my practice turned out - it has also given me a lot of craft practice and therefore practical knowledge due to the many hours spent with the material. Now the knowledge I have gotten lies within my hands. Furthermore my practice has given me the respect and understanding of what the empathic gesture of giving someone, or something, my time truly means - in a sense it has made me more patient and understanding. It also created an urge within me to fully grasp the differences between art and craft, which has been a strong driving force throughout my practice.

## A Shift of Perspective

A wish I have had throughout my practice has been to understand the differences between art and craft, two at first glance quite similar fields of study. It has been provocative at times. I understood that there was a hierarchical structure between the two fields, where craft was positioned lower than art. Quite frankly I found it a bit ridiculous. Why put precious time and energy in such a silly problem? I thought that, if I as a practitioner would let this conflict (that I did not even think was relevant any longer) get too much of my attention it would probably affect the way I work. Similarly to when I understood that you could question traditions in your own field, I thought I would question that system. I started to work with video and performance with unfired ceramic pieces and myself as central characters. I invented a game with the rules and traditions of ceramics as I understood them and asked myself questions such as:

If I work with functional objects, but take away the one aspect that makes the object worthy of the word functional, what is the object then? And, thinking of function: If an object is made with the intention that it should dissolve, does that not have to imply that the object is highly functional? These were my biggest questions and driving force at the time. In the introduction of *Seeing Things: Collected Writings on Art, Craft and Design*, the British ceramicist Alison Britton beautifully puts similar thoughts into words:

*"Where is the border? I wondered, until some years later I stopped looking for the border and enjoyed the uncertainty."* (Britton. 2013, 9)

Through an interest in the differences between art and craft I managed to create a method of working that I still find intriguing. I had created my path back to what excited me the most from the beginning - my interest in the material by using it to ask questions. When reading this text by Britton I felt like she put my not yet formulated thoughts into words. I have realized that I also enjoy this uncertainty.

Today I can consider my earlier way of thinking of this conflict between art and craft as naive - which in a way makes sense, but I did not reflect much upon the effects of this hierarchy or at what level it affected me. I also had a quite narrow idea of what craft could be, and over my the last years my understanding has been widened. Britton has tried to describe craft in the text *Craft - Sustaining Alternatives*, page 103. She writes:

*" 'Craft' means many different things to different ears. I must say that I do not find the word an easy one to use. Some people are put off by it altogether; it smacks to them of frumpiness and a retreat from the modern world. Paradoxically, that is exactly what others are looking for: comfort in the crafts. Writing in an exhibition leaflet in 1985 I tried to do without it.*

*Craft is a means to an end and is not really anything in itself. It consists on doing something properly, and it is a basis of recognition of values and skills and methods and knowledge of materials. It has no real substance or meaning without one or other of these leanings: the design world and the art world have equal need of it.*

*None of the terms decorative arts, applied art, design art, craft - do quite the whole job of delineating the territory."* (Britton. 2013, 103)

She continues later on in the text:

*"There is pleasure and freedom in the condition of being loosely defined. Ambiguity is the mother of invention. Makers have thrived on the variety of possibilities, the overlaps between disciplines, and the provisional atmosphere."* (Britton. 2013, 103)

When comparing the two fields, I tried to fully grasp the field of craft, but I could not manage that. I have later realized that I probably will not be able to completely define what craft is about, and that this is what makes the field interesting. This is why I had a hard time leaving the ceramic art field even though I wanted to for some years.

Ezra Shales has also given the defining of craft a chance. In the introduction of the book *The Shape of Craft*, he reasons that the best definition of craft might be that it is easy to grasp but not as easy in practice (Shales. 2017, 8).

Shales also writes about the work of the hand:

*"The philosopher and educator John Dewey believed that active hands and agile fingers made us more essentially human. Following that logic, we might say that we grow less human when we fail to see craft as a necessity".* (Shales. 2017, p. 8)

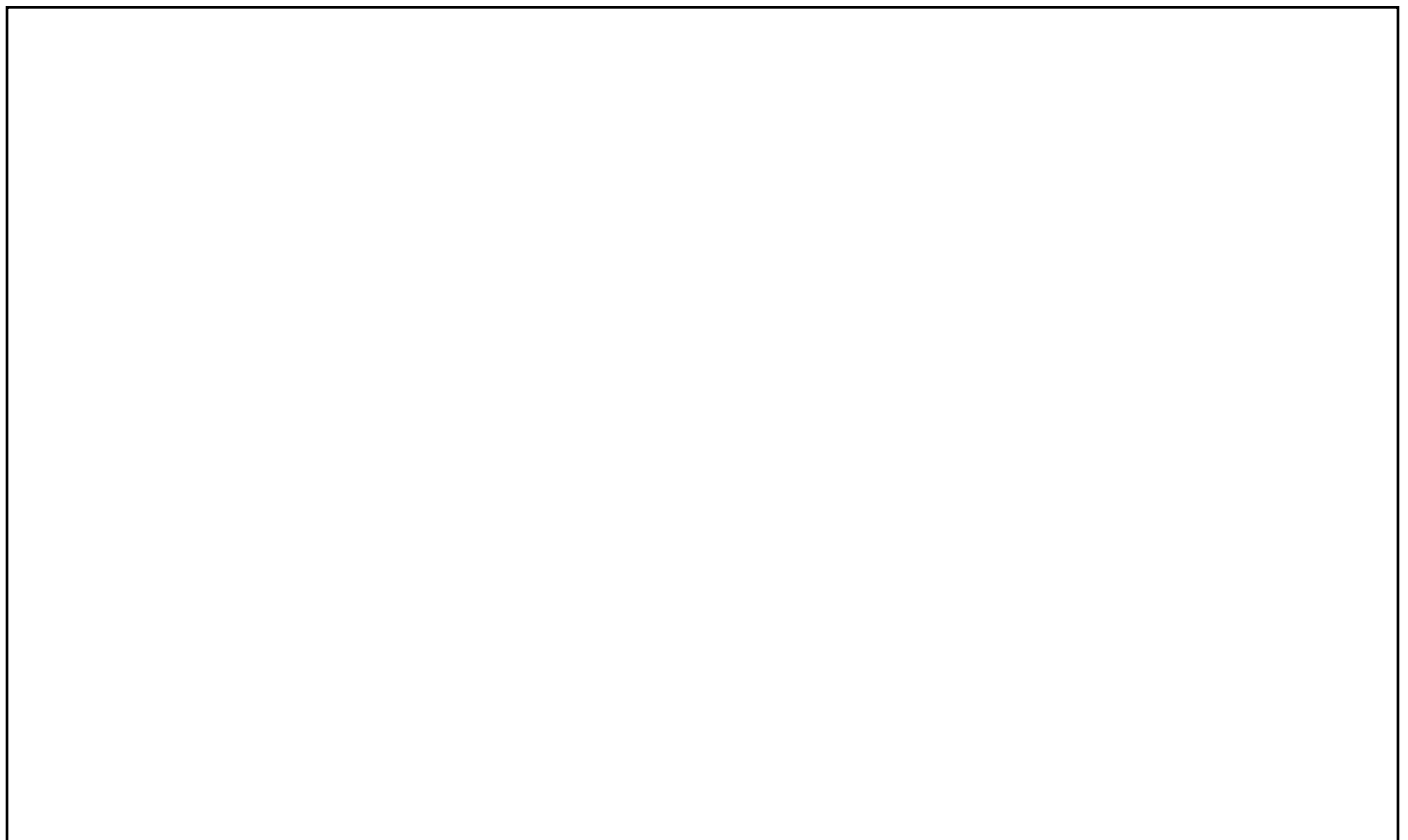


Fig. 16 British Ceramicist Alison Britton, 2017.

# The Climate in Today's Society and the Need of Non-knowledge

When reading Britton's and Shales' attempts to define craft I realize that it is hard to put this practical knowledge into words. This leads my thought to the Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark and her book *Det omätbaras renässans* (Own Translation: The renaissance of the immeasurable). In her book she talks about today's society, how the more highly valued areas of research are the ones where the effect is possible to measure. That society, ever since Descartes started his methodical doubt (and became the start for the thinkers of modern society as we know it today) is getting increasingly rationalized. (Bornemark. 2018, p.12)

She describes that in today's society where everything is measurable, we forget about something important. She borrows thoughts of two philosophers from the renaissance, Nicholas Cusanus and Giordano Bruno. Bornemark, Bruno and Cusanus presents to us a structure from which we can understand and explain the world and our minds, what we know and what we cannot know. They call the things hard for us to grasp by reasoning as a sort of non-knowledge. Non-knowledge (or in Swedish: icke-vetande) can be explained as holes within our knowledge that we cannot explain. Cusanus mentions this non-knowledge as something that stretches beyond what we know and therefore increases the possibility to reach something new. He reasons that non-knowledge is something that defines human life. (Bornemark. 2018, p.34)

Further on Bornemark explains that in Cusanus way of portraying our minds, he splits the way our mind operates into two parts - Intellectus and ratio. Ratio is the part of our intellect that processes information presented to us through our senses, it structures and categorizes. The intellectus is relating to the categories of the ratio, but examines these categories and reasons around them. Intellectus works as a free gaze over the structures the ratio creates and helps us with the understanding of the ratios categories. If intellectus is repressed and the ratio takes over, there is a risk that the ratio congeals, decays and get frozen. This she argues is possible in a time when we thirst for knowledge, and is the danger with the repression of intellectus (Bornemark 2018, 42-46).

I think that this is interesting to put in context to the field of art, and will let that guide my line of thoughts in the following chapter.



## The Importance of Art and Craft Practices - Discussion

As I understand intellectus the way Jonna Bornemark declares it, it is strongly related to what I presented in the previous chapter - the non-knowledge (icke-vetande). I think that a practice of art or craft can stand as the practice of intellectus, and for instance a science in mathematics or physics as the ratio. Today I find these more rational topics (mathematics for instance) as higher valued than art and craft since art and craft is not as easy defined and not as clear in terms of result. How do we measure the result of an art experience? Is it plausible to argue that we live in a time where intellectus is getting repressed? Even though this is hard, the intellectus and the ratio is in strong position of dependency towards each other - they are equally important for us to move forward. This is why we in this rationalized society have to be proud of, and fight for the importance of the more "irrational" sciences.

Even though I see difficulties in today's society due to its rational nature, I want to be part of the movement that speaks for the importance of other type of knowledges or sciences, without speaking of which type of knowledge is more important than the other. I picture myself being one of those persons who express - both in words and by physical work - around the importance of craft knowledge as a scientific knowledge. In my opinion craft practices stand out in the sense that it connects the making and the theoreticising, as Mårten Medbo writes in an unpublished text that he generously shared with me. He writes:

*"Craft knowledge makes demands on the entire person and incontrovertibly links the craftsperson to the material world. This knowledge makes no differentiation between the physical and the spiritual; it is theory and practice as one".* (Medbo. 2020, p. 3)

I see this in my practice, and I believe this is how I see a continuation in my research, both practically and theoretically in the future. I have created a method that encourages me to operate in the field of craft. For me, my process has balance in the sense that it is demanding, rewarding and interesting simultaneously both aesthetically and intellectually. I believe that through thinking of my work as a dialogue with clay, I can find a sustainable relation to myself as well as materials and beings around me. In this way of working, in my dialogue with clay, I feel connected to what happens around me, the time I live in. In this way I find a norm critical approach to the way I am handling my material as well as how we think of material and what materiality can teach us.

When reading texts of these writers, practitioners and philosophers presented in my paper, I cannot help but think that they are talking about the same thing in different ways. In my opinion they all talk about that we have to remember the importance of material based knowledge. Together with these chosen writers, I argue that through our relationship to and knowledge in material, we as craft practitioners can serve as empathic role models in a society that to me seems more rational than ever before. I believe that this is possible because of the patience we have towards our materials and our knowledge of them. I believe that we have the chance to show the immense importance of empathy towards our surroundings because of this knowledge.

This world is in need of empathy. By treating each other as we treat our materials - by observing them, getting to know them, reflecting upon how they behave and what effect that has in a bigger perspective - we are a strong and important voice of another perspective of value that is not possible to prove in numbers and might at times even be irrational.

Although, this is my point of view, speaking out from my experience in my practice in my material and by observing practitioners around me. I cannot speak for every craft practitioner, but in my opinion this is a possible standing point.

## Conclusion

I am a strong believer of the importance and influence of the craft scene, and I think that it is more important today than ever since we seem to forget about the value of the areas of research hard to measure the effect of in numbers. In my practice, I see no hierarchical structure between me and the material. I believe that through showing my material the respect I have for other human beings, I evolve an advanced sense of respect and care which I believe can work as opposite to a more rationalized way of being or seeing things. I believe that one of the roles we have in the field of art and craft is to discuss everything that comes with being human, all the situations that life can cover. We observe, we reflect and we question structures, both in the past as well as when moving forwards into the future. We question things that we think we already know. If we do not give this field of research a place in society I am afraid that we might lose the connection to our roots, that we forget our relationship to our past and therefore move towards an imbalanced future. I am not suggesting that we should forget completely about rationality and focus on a more non-knowledge inspired way of picturing the world, but rather a combination of them both - they are depending on each other.. I think that the two different fields of research can enlighten each other, that they are both equally important.

In my work I process thoughts of life and death, how time moves and how I have to adapt to that fact whether I like it or not - a theme from where my sculptures find their shape. I consider that my practical work and text are a form of science, and a purposeful one, since I believe that today's society questions the field in which I operate and by that shows a lack of empathy and understanding. Going back to the research question formulated in the beginning of the text:

Can a material based practice stand as lodestar in today's society, to show empathy towards each other as beings as well as our surroundings?

Through the fact that we thoroughly practice our material and by means of that practice patience and understanding, we get more empathic as beings. I picture a practice of craft as an excellent lodestar for society to be inspired to get a more empathetic approach to life, for our understanding of each other and what it is to be living.

In my process, in my dialogue with clay, I am not quite sure whether the discussion comes to any conclusions, if the discussion ever comes to an end. As long as I live and experience, I guess there will be plenty of things to discuss, things to understand, problems to solve and events to observe.

## Appendix

This appendix contains a translated short interview with Mårten Medbo that I find relevant. Other than that, I want to end this essay with a text written during this period when doing my masters that I enjoy but has not found a natural spot in the text.

### Interview with Mårten Medbo

**When reading your dissertation I get curious of how and when you started to think of your clay based practice as a kind of language-ness. In the text it seems so obvious, but usually the most obvious things are the hardest to grasp. Do you remember how, or maybe when you started to think of your objects as communicative?**

-At some level I have always been thinking of my objects as communicative. In the beginning it was more of an unreflected understanding. I mean that I had the feeling they were important in the sense of the dialogue created within the work between me and the material, as well as important in terms of how the objects communicated with others. In this way I believe that the communicative potential of clay is shown through the makers desire to create. Often this relation and understanding is intuitive within the maker. For me personally it started with an artistic crisis which led me to more consciously reflect upon the language-ness of clay. I doubted my own artistic expressions and had difficulties formulating myself around my practice, which motivated me to study as a PHD student. In one way I think of the describing of clay as a communicative tool as a way to insist on its intrinsic value - to enlighten the value of things not possible to capture with words. My research needed to insist on this because of the growing theorization within the craft field during the late 90's and early 00's.

**For me in my practice, I have started to think about clay as a metaphor to human life or living. This has led me to thinking that I communicate with my material. I picture clay as a partner for discussion and together we reflect upon life as we experience it (We don't have any clear answers wether we're getting to any conclusions but at least we reflect together). Since I think of language (as I know it) as something human, I have started to reflect upon clay as a material with human qualities. How it is shapable yet steady, how it demands my full presence and attention to get to know it properly - to be able to process it correctly. How it takes time for its practitioner to understand how it acts differently depending on how we handle it.**

**Is this something you have reflected upon, or do you rather picture the material as something you have understood how to master, a material that you shape the way you want to?**

-In essence I can support your way of describing clay. As a communicative material it demands me to have a responsive approach of its possibilities and its restrictions. It also demands me to practice my skill of articulating myself through it, in other words my ability to shape it. When shaping clay, I am in dialogue with the material chosen for my articulation, regardless wether the material is clay, words or any other communicative material.

**Follow up question:**

**If so, have you ever been scared of being understood as wolly?**

-I have had the feeling of being read as both wolly, trivial and naive sometimes when discussing these types of questions that we are talking about now. In one way that might be a price you have to pay when addressing such elementary questions of artistic practice. In my opinion that makes them even more important to ask. It is often the persons who makes you feel wolly, naive and trivial that are less reflected upon these questions than they want to appear.

**Recently I have been thinking a lot about the meaning of craft in todays society, which role the craft scene plays. I think about how we as practitioners in a chosen material seem to have the patience and persistence to get to know a material, materiality. This leads my thought to how we seem to forget a lot of this knowledge in todays society, how the craft is slowly vanishing and how that scares me that we might become rootless in a sense... How we seem to leave materiality and get more theorized. Could this be a place where the craft scene can lead the way? By addressing these problems through our materials? To remind us of the knowledge we have had for a long time, to insist on its importance even to it might not produce any quick economical reward?**

- I agree with you. Recently I have been thinking a lot about the question of meaning in relation to making, crafting and creating. In some ways I think that our ideas of the meaningful is strongly affected by the society we live in. For example, it is not far fetched to think that a society where the prerequisites is increased consumption makes sure that we find meaning in consumption. This is where I think that the craft field is interesting since it in one way argues that the field has an independent meaning outside the rationality of economics. A meaning that occurs when a practitioner stands in dialogue with her material. Hopefully this dialogue ends up with objects filled with meaning. Maybe this meaning can reoccur when someone encounters those objects. In essence, this is what for example William Morris argued.

## Understandings of Not Knowing

I am a seeker and I do not always know what I am looking for, but I find stimulation within uncertainty. I have collected my earlier experiences from educations in a toolbox, and from that toolbox I pick that specific tool that suits a certain moment. In this sense I might have a hard time deciding which tool to pick up and for this exam paper I have had a hard time deciding where in all of my interests to put my point of focus.

This searching without knowing exactly what for, or after what, makes me think of my grandfather who in his older days suffered from dementia caused by high age. Once I met him lying on the floor, looking for something with great intensity.

-What are you looking for? I asked him.

-I do not know. He said, laughing as he answered me.

At first I found the presented scene rather funny, but in the next moment the dark side of aging made my laughter stuck in my throat. I came to think of this in the beginning of the second year of my master when I tried to understand what I was looking for in my artistic practice - what am I really doing? This memory replayed itself in front of me and I thought to myself - If you are not aware of what you are looking for, should not that open up for something that you did not expect from the beginning to find, and could not that therefore lead to something that you did not know from before? Suddenly I realized that my grandfather and his dementia were onto something really clever, that might describe my process of working with clay. In the making of things I am a seeker of those moments where I feel something, where I find that the creative process of making can tell me something that I did not know before, where objects or material starts to talk to me. Those findings that does not only speak to my intellect, but also with my emotions and what it is to be living, those moments that speaks about notions of empathy and what it is to be human. I believe that a clay based practice is a great medium for doing this, because of the materials many different qualities.

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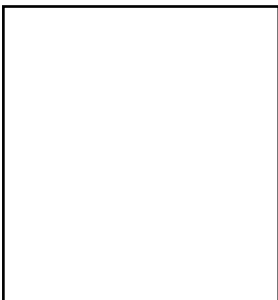
## Image Reference List



**Figure 1:** Photo of Clare Twomeys work *Consciousness/Conscience*. hollow unfired Bone China tiles. Tate, Liverpool; Crafts Council, London; and Icheon, Korea 2001-2004.

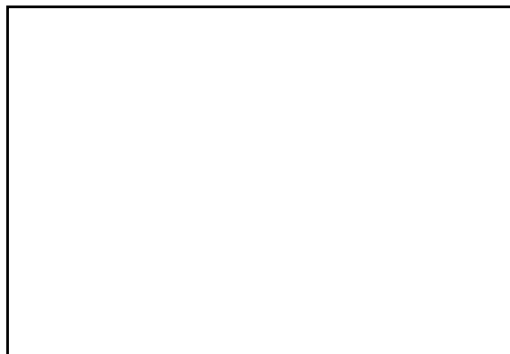
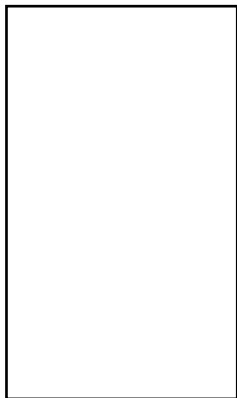
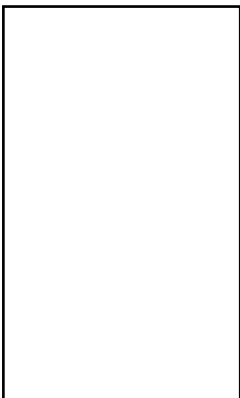
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**Figure 12:** Photo of Peter Voulkos making an untitled piece. 1956. Oppi Untracht photo, courtesy of the Voulkos & Co. Catalogue Project. Found on Antiques and the arts. Accessed March 11, 2020.

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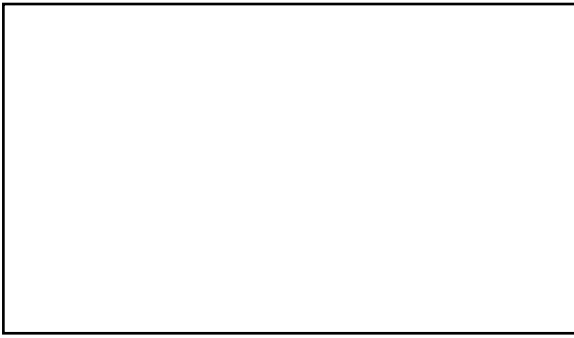


**Figure 13, 14, 15:** Documentation photos of Mårten Medbo's performance/installation *Homo Capax* shown at Gustavsbergs Konsthall 2013.

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**Figure 16:** Alison Britton. 2017. BBC Radio 4.  
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