



GÖTEBORGS
UNIVERSITET

HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

JORDBÅT

Author: *Filip Schmidt*

Title: *Jordbåt*

Programme: *BFA in Metal Art, 180 credits*

Course: SBMGEX 22,5 hp

Level: First Cycle

Term & Year: VT21

Tutor: Tobias Birgersson, Jorge Manilla

Examiner: Professor Heiner Zimmermann

Opponents: Vivi Touloumidi, Sabine Straub

Table of contents

Abstract	3
Background	4
Purpose	11
Objective	
Question Formulation	
Approach	
Process	12
Reflection.....	21
Discussion.....	22
Conclusion	

Key Words

Loss. Time. Longing. Binding. Boat. Ephemerality. Coffin. Metal Art. Poetry. Steel.

Abstract:

The title '*Jordbåt*' is roughly translated into 'Soil Boat'. It could be the unearthing of a time gone by, a coffin, or a vessel of reaching beyond. These notions has been a recurring element in my past two years of working with binding metal.

In this project, I have sought to explore my memories, distorted by time in relation to the archetypical imagery of a boat. By manifesting the romanticized notion of something that once was, to show the duality of absence and presence, I hope to evoke a sombre moment of reminiscence.

Background:

Binding

Historically, the act of binding an object seems to be connected to preservation, reverence and care. Whether it be the mummies of ancient Egypt, where the wrappings served a divine purpose of conservation or the traditional Japanese way of packaging food.

Hideyuki Oka (2008), a Japanese graphic designer, who documented this lost art, writes in his book *"How to Wrap Five More Eggs"* (p.8):

"Doubtless the earliest packaging was accomplished by wrapping a given object in whatever material lay at hand. The outcome was often not only adequate for storing and transporting the object but might well have been a simple, beautiful shape free of all excess and extravagance."

...

"Not only did it afford great protection to its fragile contents, but, even though entirely unconsciously, it also enhanced the feeling of the freshness and warmth of newly laid eggs."

As aspects of everything between both divinity and the more ephemeral things in life, I think it is imprinted that bound objects instill a sense of security. This became very evident for me when I started with binding objects in metal.



Gårdsgård, Kim Nilsson (2010)

The Boat

The boat holds very strong symbolic connotations. They are depicted all over the world in various myths or personal beliefs as carrying vessels of life, death, transitional forces and spiritual freedom. My own cultural understanding of the boat as a symbol is derived from the vikings or rather, the image of them as enforced by national romanticism. This is something that I had to bear in my mind while working with the form, lest it became a nod to values and narratives that had very little to do with the project.



Rather than adhering to the immediate symbolism that the boat entails, I picked out and formulated my own standpoint in relation to previous works. The simple truth of the boat for me is its presence in my childhood memories and its absence in the present.

Previous projects:

'Worm Envy'

The first project where I implemented the binding was after the passing of someone very close to me. The work had started prior but with the circumstances the aim changed for me. It felt urgent and the work started to encompass the feelings I had.

I would wind iron thread around pieces of wood, disfigure it and ultimately burn it. The seemingly endless process of covering all the surface of the wood with thin thread became a way for me to channel any violent feeling of resignation into making.



Swedish sculptor Berit Lindfeldt (2020), along with other artists, had an exhibition at Bonniers Konsthall titled "Sorgearbete" or "The Work of Mourning". When asked about her process of making in relation to her personal experience with loss, she stated;

"When these works were created, it was simply about getting my hands into the material. It was an extreme situation, preoccupied with grief, and the work was a refuge and my practice with handicraft an asset..."

...The sluggishness of the work made something evident. The broken and painful could be given form, even for me."



Berit Lindfeldt, *Puppa* (1988). Foto: Jean-Baptiste Béranger

It resulted in a series of work, dealing with grief and the feeling of wanting to stick together in the face of acute sadness. In extension it served as a farewell, being able to let go of the immediate pain and bury it.

'Shores' and 'Septuaginta'

The second project came about in the tracks of COVID-19 when our workshop closed and I had to find other ways of working. It started out in the forest, working with what nature would provide such as logs, branches and roots. I started thinking about other days, older days being held safe in the woods. Old rusty nails, rotten cabins became something i wanted to investigate with my work.

It culminated in a somewhat 'childish' exploration of form where I would stack branches, bind them with roots and place them in the forest. It denoted a sense of primal creativity that I think that, growing up in Sweden and its woods, many children learn that they can alter their surroundings by hand. I made shelters, constructions, boats that reflected how I remembered this notion and

ultimately I think it related to the before mentioned aspect of lost time. Something that cant be regained.



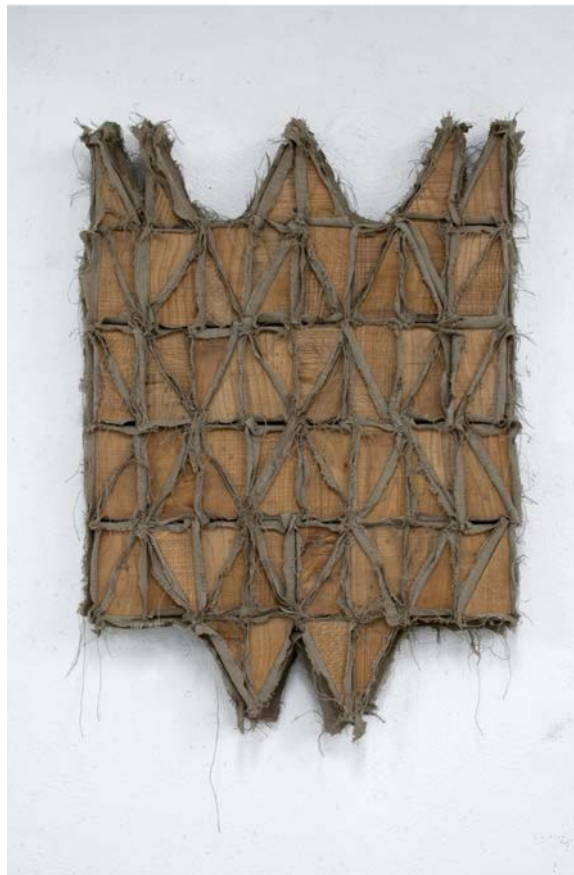
Later, I wanted to work with this new concept, manifesting a reminder of the older days, the hardships and happiness of the people before me. Using my binding technique wasn't something I had planned for this project but by mere chance I found old rusty iron thread laying in a damp forest grove. It felt as something important, like something coming back to me. It ended up with me making two sculptures having the bindings as a feature.



Around this time I discovered the work of Jacobo Castellano (1976). He is a Spanish born artist whose work deals with his own relation to time. Through found material and memories, his work evokes a sense of nostalgia, a nod to the melancholy of ephemerality. These notions becomes interwoven in the everyday objects he choose to repurpose into his work.

To me, his work adheres to his Andalusian roots. Having spent quite a lot of time in Andalusia myself, I know the profound impact that tradition and religion still has in the region and the common ground it entails. I think it allows his work to have a firm place of reference to everyday life of bygone days.

Coming from secular Sweden, I think its fair to assume that many, including myself, in the country feel a disconnect with our own history. I think that somewhere we lost the traces and connections to the older days and in extension, our understanding of empathy and emotions in a country that still has great distances not only between houses but also between people.



Jacobo Castellano, *Sin Titulo*

'Hemsökaren'

Last semester I knew that i wanted to continue the investigation of my bindings in relation to time. I also abandoned the iron thread and looked for other ways of wrapping with metal. This was without any discernible purpose other than expression. After some time searching, I felt that i was only repeating myself but in a different manner.

I realized that the unity of what was being bound and the bindings became stagnating. I needed to look elsewhere and saw that the bindings could tell their own story. I started removing the wood from my pieces and found that in the empty space within the bindings, I could place that which might have been lost to time or a piece of an uncertain future. To me, my work started to encompass feelings of longing, to venture beyond the now, wishing that something once or never experienced had or would happen.

In some ways it became a conclusion of my investigations from the previous projects. Refraining from uncomfortable words like "melancholy" the work is as much an endless investigation as the concepts that it entails. From will, vision to action it started to make sense for myself; There is an underlying feeling, something I can scarcely perceive, that permeates my entire process and ultimately solves fragments of my aim.

To me the binding of metal entails the action of to keep things together. It shows notions of both strength and fragility. I like to believe that binding is devoid of malice, that it rather shows something that could be caring, nurturing without being boastful in its actions. The folds becomes an act of embrace, making each interaction of the bindings sturdy without being constricting. Looking at them I think they appear as fleeting moments. There is an anticipation of them unraveling yet they stick together.



Purpose:

My purpose is to further develop and articulate my previous intentions of manifesting the thoughts I have about loss, time and longing. Furthermore, to explore other possibilities of making the bindings and how I can present my work.

Objective:

My objective is to explore other aspects of how I perceive my work and to apply what have learned through my older projects. Seeing as the boat has come to encompass my previous intentions, although symbolically, it's a form i wish to explore. I want to see how the bindings can define the absence of a boat and what techniques and materials I would need to use to make said shape.

With this project I want to show these feelings that might haunt us, the 'disdained' sides of oneself in another light. To evoke a sense of sadness, that has nothing to do with sorrow, that could be perceived as beautiful and important in understanding who you are.

Question formulation:

How to manifest my thoughts of loss, time and longing?

Where in the action and decisions when working with the material do I find a relationship to the concept of the absence of a boat?

What values does the metal bring for the finished piece?

Approach:

I will start by taking inventory of my previous work within this theme. This is to be able to discern the things, details etc. in the projects that I think could develop my thought process. To look for and define the qualities within the material and its expression along with making sketches and writings to create a frame of reference and inspiration.

I will work with material experimentations alongside making graphical work as I have found that a more non-linear process seem to yield results that, I think resonates more with my notion or intention. Being able to take a step back after producing quantitates of material, reflect and see what works rather than working with a pre-conceived image.

I hope that it will result in a piece that tells what I've learned up until this point, both in terms of material and emotion.

Process:

Starting out with a project, I tend to heavily rely on that the immediate impressions of an initial notion will put me in the right mood. What that notion is, is something I can't define. In the interest of the rewarding experience of any creative output it ultimately becomes unnecessary to put into words for me. In realizing this I have allowed myself not to analyze any decisions during the process as it would stagnate the workflow and lead my mind astray. I will rather look back on the process once the project is finished. It is my belief that a whole truth about a process cannot and maybe should not be presented. With this said, I will show my process and my thoughts around it.

Looking back on my previous projects was the starting point of this work. I was trying to recollect the notions I had previously experienced with the goal of finding a common denominator in terms of aesthetic expression and emotional output.

Immediately a restlessness transpired as I felt that all the previous works were closed chapters. Reviewing the work didn't give me any new insights of a potential framework and so I started experimenting with new expressions of the bindings.

These new bindings, although some of them presented values that resonated with me, led to even more confusion as to what I was searching for. They either became too similar to my other bindings or simply too time consuming to make. Seeing as it was important that I had to produce a lot of material in short time, I needed to take a step back and look at other possibilities.

There was something missing and I realized that I could not make any firm conclusions by material investigation alone. Compared to how I would usually go into a process, I didn't feel a strike in the heart, the urgency of something unfurling. I abandoned the bindings for the time being and focused on graphical work that could push me into another light.

With the graphical work I wanted to search for the essence of what could become new work. The *House* was the first sketch that I made for the project. It came about from exposing myself to the sombre clad texts of Swedish poet Dan Andersson (1915), mainly his collection titled '*Kolvaktarens visor*' (1915, 1944) which I interpret as a recollection of echoes and memories of ordinary people. Reverting back to my own memories I realized that it was easy to connect them to structures, objects and smells. The *House* encompassed these notions, looking back at the endless summers of childhood spent roaming the forests of Roslagen by the Swedish east coast. This house is how I remember an old rotten cabin in Vaddö.



In realizing this, I would later make two other works to accompany the *House; Gärdsgårdsvals* as I remember the old nordic style fence that once stood behind our cottage and ultimately *Jordbåt* which shows a small boat that would lay by the rocky shores of the sea of Åland.



Once again the boat had come back to me. Although this time it appeared more vague and more fragile, almost as something peripheral. I knew it was important and a good starting point so I could very quickly build a framework to gather impressions and draw up simple sketches.

I had yet to decide what bindings to use. After a lot of pondering on what I wanted to convey I suffered an internal stress and made the decision to keep working with the expression from '*Hemsökaren*'. It's concept of lost time and longing overlapped with the intention of the project and I thought it could become a more articulate continuation. Knowing already the means and steps of production I imagined I could allow myself to focus more on form. In the interest of a balanced process and a separation of work-time and leisure-time it was appealing.

Thinking again about my intention I wanted a more imposing sense of somberness, something that demanded a bodily resonance between the viewer and the work. Therefore I chose a bigger size than previously, the maximum size of a coffin.

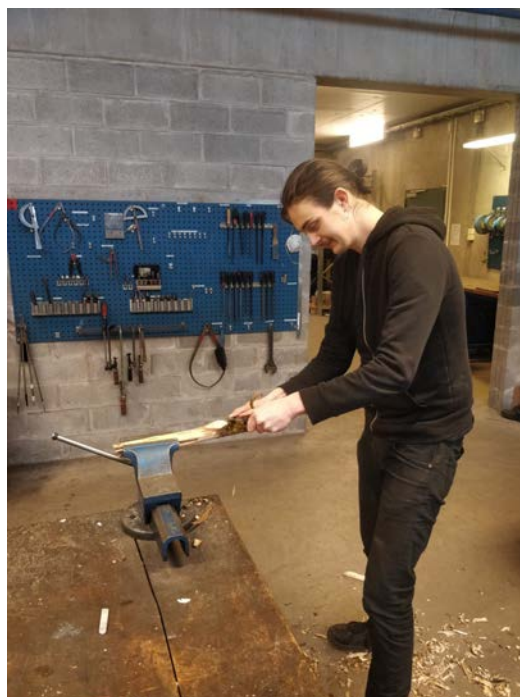
First, I translated the graphical boat into a jig of thick metal wire in a very literal sense. I followed the outlines and welded together a three-dimensional form. Decisions made for any small detail of the work such as the pointy hull came from reverting back to my memories.



Interacting with the finished jig it was just enough to cover ones physical being. Standing and towering over me or laying beside it I immediately felt a presence.



The jig was done and so I went back to one of my quick sketches. This particular one felt as a summary of my older works and it incorporated branches along with the bindings. The original intent of the branches was to manifest the last remnants of a boat with the bindings as an act of repairing and safekeeping. I went out into the forest and gathered branches that had a similar shape to the jig and debarked them. Debarking them resonated with me as a way to artificially create something that appeared old and man-made.





Having all the pieces of wood ready, I wrapped the jig in paper and made a first of draft of composition. I only drew down what It could possibly be without any pretense.

I started assembling the wooden pieces according to the sketch and bound them together. From the get-go some issues arose regarding what was necessary for the structure contra the concept. I had to heat up the bindings before attaching them which, unsurprisingly, caused the wood to char and burn. Any claims of care and preservation started to feel secondary and so I changed method.



Feeling somewhat distraught and stagnate I made the decision to only include three of the branches and to let the bindings fill out the rest. In conversation with fellow student Daniel Freyne he pointed out that construction of the piece would require two sets of hands. He offered to help and so I made several segments to be attached to the jig and we started puzzling it together. I accepted two things; maybe the work was too technical for one person and also that the wood had to suffer burning in order to finalize the piece. It went well working together but ultimately the wood couldn't handle the fire and hammer blows.



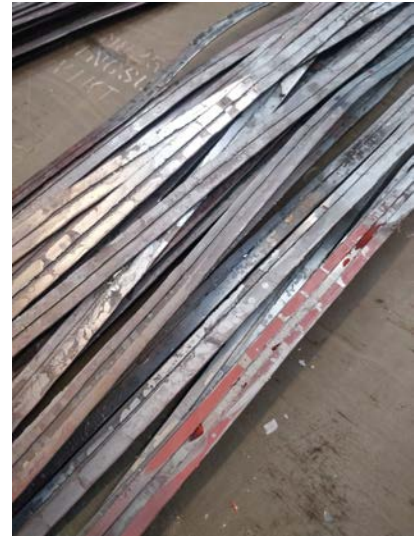
Although a setback, I realized that the wood was neither structurally nor conceptually important. If I wanted to work with the absence of a boat why would the remnants of it still be there? It was a relief and a reassurance that it could work without the wood. I could now focus on the bindings, how to place them and capture the essence of a boat shape. This also allowed me to work alone. Given that I have a rather independent and introverted frame of notions in the process, I felt an absolute involvement once again.

I looked at what could define the shape and space within and scribbled it down on a small model. It was important to avoid symmetry and any rational thought on how it could have been bound. Going back to the before mentioned time-distorted, the peripheral sense of a boat I wanted the outcome to reflect the archetypical and recognizable yet somehow askew.

Assembly:

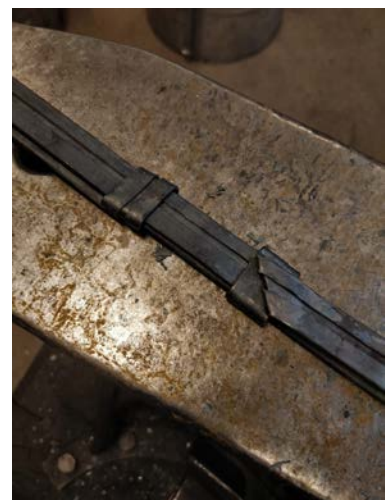
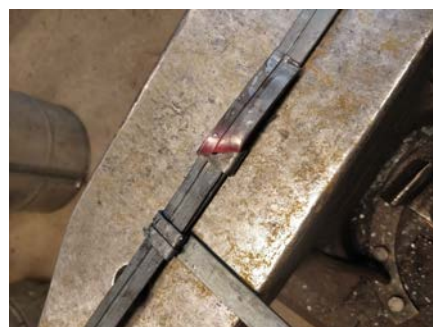
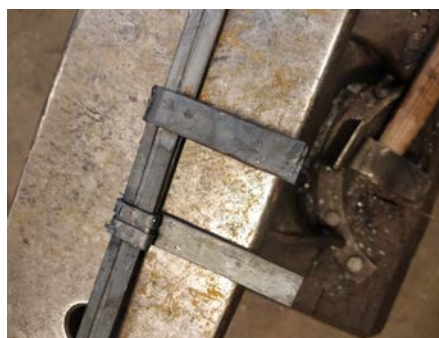
The assembly began with the production of the bindings. As opposed to the production when making '*Hemsökaren*', where each of the bindings were made entirely by hand, I worked solely with machines in order to produce large quantities of material in a short time. Looking back at both of these methods there is no apparent difference in the expression. I cut a sheet of 1mm mild steel

into strips and folded the edges. With '*Hemsökaren*' it was hard to define what the purpose of the folding was. There was no thought behind it more than something that resonated with me. As I have talked about it with fellow students and my external tutor Jorge Manilla I think that it is because it removes the expected sharpness of the steel. Therefore it adds to the bindings as something caring.



I then used the power hammer to flatten them before putting them in a gas furnace. I heated the material and flattened it once again. It provided me with both a texture that diverted the thoughts of the clean stock material by scaling and it also removed the hammer marks from the first flattening. With this method I could produce about 65 bindings in a full work day, giving me more time to focus on construction of the piece.

Having the tools from earlier projects on how to connect the bindings I anticipated the assembly to be rather swift. These connections, folds, varies to some extent but the most common ones are made as shown in this picture.



Attaching the bindings required some preparation. They measure to about 1m in length and so I needed to make several 'extended' bindings to fit the general size and outline of the boat shape. Connecting several extensions would be difficult once I had attached them to the jig.



Once I had clamped the extended binding onto the jig it allowed me to attach one piece at a time. Attaching them required an acetylene torch, tongs, hammer and a flattener as an handheld anvil. This process allowed me to rely on repetitive action and compositional vision, putting technical thoughts aside for a moment.

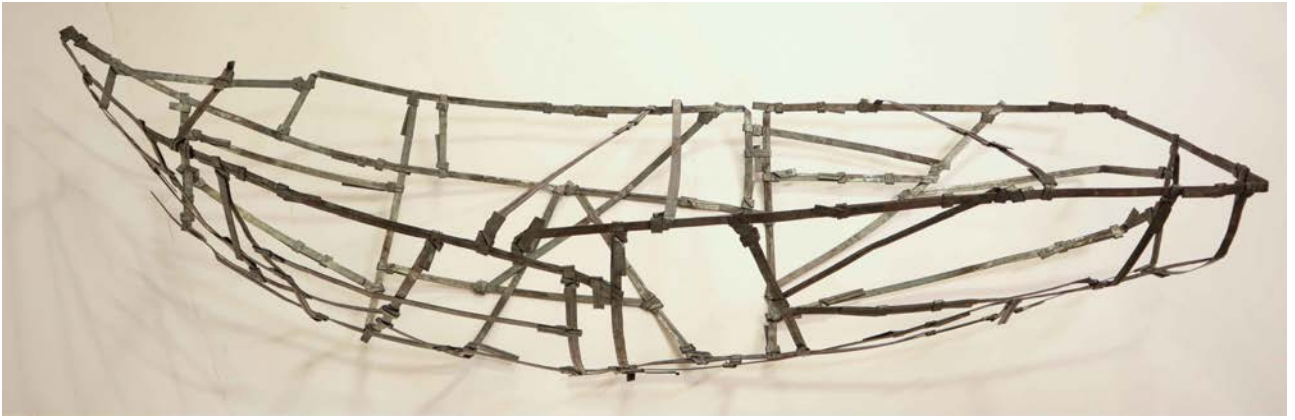


The biggest challenge of assembly was to maintain consistency in the placing of the bindings. I started with the back part of the shape and followed the lines of the smaller model. As it expanded towards the front I had to abandon the model in order to maintain a sturdier structure. Suddenly it felt as two different expressions in one. To me, it resembled a spider web which was an association I wanted to avoid. Taking a step back and evaluating what had to be done, I removed and rearranged the front part until I experienced some kind of unity.



Once it started to take form I removed it from the jig. Looking at it, it felt too empty and I could barely see the boat shape due to its instability. It became apparent that I had to add more bindings. This proved to be an balance act where I had to stabilize yet to not cover up all the empty spaces. I came to the conclusion that some parts of the piece had to be in closer proximity to one another to allow for an overall hollow expression.

I removed it from the jig once again and saw that it was a step in the right direction yet it still suffered some instability. I pondered over different possibilities and made the decision to cover the 'open' part of the boat with a few of the bindings. This gave a more direct sense of an inside and an outside of the piece. In extension, the defined space I now had made somehow resonated with me in the form of a song, "*En Sångarsaga*" with text by poet Gustaf Fröding (1860, 1896) and music by Mando Diao (2012). This song holds a very dear place in my heart yet I had not heard it in a long time. To me it encompasses a notion of my past memories, of water, love and death. At this point any addition to the form would feel obsolete and I considered the assembly work done.



Reflection:

In my the purpose section of my work, I stated that I wanted to further articulate my thoughts on the concepts surrounding my work. How loss, time and longing can be manifested by presenting the absence of a boat. An underlying intention of the work was to reach out, to communicate these notions and connect with the viewer as I have been previously encouraged to not stay in my own "bubble". Although, through my work, through the discussions of my exam and my talks with my external tutor Jorge Manilla there has been an internal conflict in my view of whats important for the project.

I had chosen Jorge Manilla as an external tutor as I saw similarities within his work both visually and conceptually with my work. Conceptually speaking of the confrontational act in facing our pure, 'horrible' and beautiful emotions and visually by implementing bindings in his work, this was something that spoke in a very direct sense to me.

During our first meeting, Manilla quickly discerned aspects of my work and method that were completely new to me. He asked me to explain my project and at the time I had yet to define what it could entail. Looking back I felt like I was rambling with no clear comprehension or maybe even a lack of desire to explain myself. I think its because of previous experiences trying to explain my work to someone outside of the school context. I have at times felt inadequacy in delivering something that made sense. I showed him the work from '*Hemsökaren*' and at that point I think there was a common ground in which we could communicate more freely.

As mentioned in the process section, he explained what the folding of the steel encompassed in a way that made sense for what I wanted to convey: the disarmed sharpness of the material, the acts of embrace between the connections. Something that showed a sense of care towards the perciever.

The thing that Manilla pointed out, that ultimately became the biggest eye-opener for me, was the dualities that permeated a lot of the project;

In my attempt to show the absence of something, I had created an equal presence by binding it.

*

To create something that appears fragile, I had used 'violent' force.

*

In the process of construction, an absence of mind and presence of body.

In realizing these dualities I understood another importance for my work. The things I value also carry its own opposite. What this means for my projects in the past up until now is that, in extension, loss carries reconciliation, time carries no-time and longing carries an end. What I understand now is that the boat has come to encompass these notions, the manifestation of opposites in equilibrium. A stillness achieved from the turmoil of lost time or losing something very important to you, now becoming a sombre reminder or a way onwards.

Discussion

For the exam presentation I had two opponents, Vivi Touloumidi and Sabine Straub. Touloumidi has a background in contextual art, as a researcher and craftsperson in contemporary craft and jewelry. Straub works with public artwork.

Touloumidi, being my main opponent, had a mix of conversational questions and more concrete suggestions for my process and end result. Although I experienced that I could answer most of the questions given, I had a hard time relating to their formulation. I felt a certain disconnect that led me to question myself in what I had presented, both the actual presentation and the first draft of the report. Touloumidi asked me about the healing aspect of my work, reverting back to my '*Worm Envy*' project, something that I considered a project of the time it was made, dealing with acute sadness, and not necessarily what I wanted '*Jordbåt*' to convey.

The suggestions I got from the opponents revolved around making and presenting my work in a more performative manner. I interpreted it as that my work would encompass the process of decay and rebuilding, where I could show the urgency and maybe even desperation of keeping things together by binding. Although some aspects of it felt appealing, I saw that most of what was regarded in their critique related mostly to the presence aspect of my work, the physical, whereas the absence, the conceptual, disappeared.

Something that Straub pointed out was that she thought the idea being the project got lost behind the boat. She experienced that I was being unnecessarily intellectual in my defense and explanations, something that felt wildly unfamiliar to me. She stated that in the end, what she saw was just a beautiful sculpture.

By the end of the presentation I got a question about the importance of the poetic references, regarding Gustaf Fröding and Dan Andersson, in my work. There I found an answer to a social aspect with my work. I said that the moods and narratives of these poems depict a universal array of emotions, of everyday life within and between common people. I realized these poems become timeless in their depiction of sadness and tribulation, something we still need to consider today when talking about topics such as mental illness for example. Sadness needs to be experienced, not pushed aside, lest it becomes something restrictive and destructive. It is my opinion that art needs to oppose indifference and apathy and to allow for unhindered emotional experiences.

Conclusion

The conclusion of my report will be in a similar manner as my reflection. As I feel I have accounted for the different decisions and realizations in both process up until the presentation, there is not much more for me to add.

Looking back, I think the biggest disconnect with my project was the use of the boat. What I had feared, and what was enforced by what Straub mentioned, is that the outcome would maybe only be perceived as something highly archaic and symbolic rather than the notion of loss and memory. I think the answer of form within my work lies somewhere where it sparks curiosity just enough without revealing too much.

What 'Jordbåt' has come to encompass is an equal amount of questions and answers, something that I am grateful for. Even though some aspects have at times felt discouraging, even to a point of serious doubt in my abilities as an artist, ultimately what the project evoked in me is a sense of closure. I know now where the importance of the outcome lie, what to avoid and how to further open up my world to anyone who is willing to lend their eyes and ears.

I will end this report with an excerpt from Dan Anderssons poem 'Minnet' (1920, 1944 p.233). In the interest of keeping it as it once inspired me, I have chosen to not translate it lest my words would alter it. Listen to the words and spaces in between. Maybe it offers more clarity around the project, it did for me.

*"Av allt du gjort jag endast minnet är
och du blir aldrig salig på att ha mig här.
Och om du är en man av stolthet och av ära
och står liksom en karl för allt du gjort,
så är din plikt att tåligt mig på ryggen bära,
jag stinker nog, men hindrar icke stort!
Försök ej mer - du känner icke mig,
jag dör blott en gång till: och då med dig!
Blygs ej att genom världen bära Minnet
jag blott kan ses och märkas utav dig,
och allt vad dina vänner varsna är
blott jämt din trötta gång, ditt pinta öga,
och även detta döljs för dem ju mer
du tappert under minnets börda ler
och vänder blicken stadigt mot det höga.
Då skall du känna hur på hjärtats spända strängar
en fröjd likt lätta pärlor faller ner
och spelar som en vind på sköna blomstersängar."* (1920)



Reference List

Andersson, D (1920, 1944) *Visor och ballader*. Stockholm: Tidens förlag

Bonniers Konsthall (2020) *A Conversation with Berit Lindfeldt*. Retrieved 2021-02-03 <https://bonnierskonsthall.se/en/utställning/the-work-of-mourning/a-conversation-with-berit-lindfeldt/>

Hideyuki, O (1967, 2008) *How to Wrap Five More Eggs*. Boston, Massachusetts: Weatherhill

Infruset (2021-01-07) I *Wikipedia*. Retrieved 2021-05-27 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infruset>

Image Index

Bonniers Konsthall (2020) *Berit Lindfeldt, Puppas, 1988. Installationsvy Bonniers Konsthall, 2020*. Retrieved 2021-02-12 https://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/bonniers_konsthall/images/sorgearbete-installationsvy-bonniers-konsthall-2020-2028785

Nilsson, K (2010) *Gärdsgård*. Retrived 2021-04-27 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/42335730@N06/4959783131>