



## HDK-VALAND – ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

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# Remember life

Objects of remembrance



## Abstract

In this paper it is explained the process and result of making grave markers with new materials, designs and considerations. The meaning bearing foundation of these are bronze casts of objects, everyday items, that relate to the one that has passed. The idea of these objects is my belief that these objects can function as a way to remember, relate and connect to the one that has passed.

Other aspects of relevance in the process and result are the wish that the grave marker should instil a sense of place, allow for ritual or contemplation, as well as care for needs like sitting and light that illuminates important features of the grave marker, such as text or the bronze cast object. The materials used in the construction is terrazzo-concrete, weathering steel and bronze. The produced grave markers are one of black terrazzo, weathering steel and bronze – where the steel forms a partially internally lit pillar of geometrical blocks, where text and water cut ornaments glow and a glass cylinder through a terrazzo block on the top illuminates a bronze cast object. The terrazzo block is shaped to hold water, intended both to add to the illumination of the object, as well as to give a meditative focus and allow for a ritual of pouring water to fill it when visiting the grave.

The other main grave marker is one that allows for sitting and is constructed of white terrazzo and bronze, with a placeholder steel construction that could be substituted with any blocks of similar construction to the ones in the base of the first grave marker, or terrazzo blocks or a combination of both.

In addition to this, a few bronze cast objects are presented as they might appear on or by a previously existing grave.

## Keywords

Grave marker, grave, gravestone, memorial, memory, remembrance, objects, bronze, casting, terrazzo, weathering steel, burial, ritual, place, mourning, death, life, “remember life”

## Background

I have previously worked with grave markers, and this is a theme I wish to continue to explore. It intrigued me from the first time I encountered it when we had a course on the subject. To me it feels deeply relevant to work with as it is something that will be very important and emotional for most people at some point of their lives.

In my previous work I have come to work with cast objects as symbols of- and a means to connect to the one that has passed. This is now an integral part of my work with grave markers and is an aspect I intend to bring with me into my exam semester.

Grave rituals and markers have gone through a significant and continuous change throughout history, and still does. In our corner of the world, we can see this as recognisable marks in the landscape in the form of mounds and stone formations from pre-Christian times to the multitude of styles and materials that can be seen in cemeteries today. In the last 100 years alone, they have gone from being markers of a family's patriarch with anonymous family members or indicators of societal worth with professions written above the names – to more personal ones where text and imagery can refer to personal interests or characteristics. (A. Gustavsson, 2003)

Inspiration for my previous projects, as well as this one, mainly stem from my own observations of graveyards and grave markers. It has been striking to me the way that people have had grave markers designed, with text, imagery, or decorations, in order to personalize them. But also, how they later have decorated and personalized the graves with small tokens and objects that communicate their feelings or is an expression or symbol of the one that has passed.



Figure 1: Grave marker with image depicting a defining interest of the deceased. Photo: A. Gustavsson.



Figure 2: Grave marker with bronze relief bird and a bronze rocking horse toy. Photo: A. Gustavsson



Figure 3: Grave with personal objects, Molkom, Sweden. Photo: E. Candido

I believe there can be a strong emotional connection with an absent person through an object. Your grandmother's kitchen linens with her monogram on them can spawn an image of that time when you sat in the afternoon sun and she fed the sparrows from her hand. With connection I mean this waking of a memory or feeling through an object.

In the book "Ting som bär våra minnen" ("Things which carry our memories") (Rajs, Dina 2020) the author has collected stories of how items that once belonged to victims of the holocaust has become their relatives strongest connection to them: One person dug up a piece of pottery from the rubble of a house that once belonged to her grandparents. Instantly memories of the special kind of dish she used to make in this pottery came to life and vivid memories of their time together. Another person tells of how they got all the linen from his mother's closet and how in the way they are folded, he gets to relive the moment when she folded them. They use most of them but one set of bed linen he keeps untouched, the folds keep some of his mother's essence alive. Some of her being still makes an imprint in the world. On his death bed he will unfold them and use them for the first and last time. To once again be close to his mother.

*Figure 4: Grave marker by author, made in a previous course.*



My project started here. When I made this memorial for my grandfather some years ago.

And I experienced that I felt like I could sit down and have a coffee with him. So, I started thinking: What do we need to mourn? To heal after losing our loved ones or life witnesses? To remember a human life?

In the past years I've been contemplating these questions.

Asking people.

Studying graveyards.

Discovered needs.

For touching. Seeing. Using body and senses to get in contact with the one missing.

Contact with the inner loss.

## **Purpose**

I wish to explore and push the expression of my grave markers, as well as the impression of cast objects as an integral part of this expression, further in my exam work.

I wish to construct grave markers built on the idea of casting objects with a personal connection to the one that has passed away. My aim is to show that these metal cast objects can make a grave marker more personal and add a sense of connection or remembrance of the individual it belonged to.

I believe this is the reason for much of the decoration and placement of items etc. that you can find on graves, and I wish to address, and meet, this need by developing my idea further.

In so doing I hope to produce a both effectful and aesthetic grave marker design that is fitting and purpose built for a cast object. I also intend to show how these cast objects can fit in an existing grave marker setting, since I believe they can work on their own as well and that this, as well as the more complete grave markers, is a production I believe can be a part of my professional future.

## **Objective**

I intend to construct one grave marker with emphasis on a novelty and expression in design that is suited for, and can show the potential of, my cast objects and the possibilities in my chosen materials.

I also intend to construct one simpler grave marker but with similar intent.

Apart from this I will also show ways to present my cast objects either on existing grave markers or beside them with a simpler mode of production.

Overall objective is to present work that prove my concept and show the possibilities of my chosen techniques.

## **Question formulation**

How can I present a cast object that relates to an individual on a memorial in such a way that they both function together as a whole?

How can I present cast objects in such a way that an observer can envision its function in a grave marker or memorial setting?

How can I design a grave marker in such a way that family or friends feel invited to the grave in a way that can aid the healing?



Figure 5: Objects in cast bronze made by the author. Photo: author.

## Approach

I intend to have a process that involves sketching and model building in order to find an overall design that complies with my goals.

I also intend to have a look into and possibly design specific details, decorations and functions through sketching and model building. The extent of this is dependent on where my overall design leads. These might be modelled in wax or moulded in silicone for lost wax casting in bronze or other metal.

Previously I have worked with terrazzo as the basis for my grave marker designs. I will continue to have this as an option for both the overall construction and smaller design features. However, I do not wish to limit myself to this material when designing, as I believe this may constrict my thinking. I will therefore approach the material and construction choices with an open mind.

I will keep one design element with me from my previous work on this topic, cast bronze items that relate to, and remind of, the individual that the grave marker or memorial is for.

For my presentations I will use previously cast objects and maybe cast new ones, including possibly ornamental details, depending on time, progress and necessity.

In the final stages of the project, I will work in the materials that my design process has led to and construct a grave marker or memorial that can be displayed publicly.

Documentation will be in the form of photographs of- and written notes on process, models, and finished piece.



Figure 6: Process from original to bronze object. Silicone mould, wax, ceramic shell, and acid bath.

## Result of process

The process of this exam project did probably start with the very first time I saw the title of the grave marker course in our first year. Therefore, what I have thought of and forgotten earlier, or conceived in the process of this semester merge. When I look at three years old sketches, I can find something that remind me of what I just sketched up for what I thought was the first time.

I do feel this topic is deeply relevant and important, and therefore it intrigues me and give me a sense of purpose. This has led my process to be focused on trying to achieve something meaningful, repeatable and with a path forward professionally. Maybe more in the realms of design than art, but which build on my artistic knowledge in the creative process – and hopefully in result.

### The first steps and early ideas

I started with talking to people near me about what they thought were important practical or emotional aspects of visiting and tending a grave. I wrote down key words for my future work such as “light does not light up the name”, “wet knees when tending the grave”, “aching legs” etc.

To this I added my own earlier observations in graveyards where most grave markers were similar, but many showed signs of how people wished to make them more personal. I wanted my grave marker design to allow for this personalization in some way.

Since I had worked with terrazzo as a material in previous assignments, I feared I would end up working with a pre-set idea, and I did try to mentally avoid this. I sketched up shapes and worked with clay. But my main sketch tool was probably the Kapa Line. I had worked with this material before in earlier sketch processes and some of those shapes worked their way into this sketch process.



*Figure 7: Early mock-up/sketch of a lantern. The intention was to create a flat glass surface that would light up an object mounted on the edge it. It could also use an upper steel or bronze plate which could have cut out letters, like names or other text on it. They would be lit up from below through a semi translucent or frosted glass.*

*Kapa Line. Photo: author.*

In all honestly, they were probably in some way still terrazzo in my mind. I sketched up lamps that would cast light on an adjacent object. I sketched up different kind of objects where the grave marker and chair function was integrated. Still, they were these solid objects in my mind and it wasn't until I suddenly saw them in the material they were made of, three and five millimetre Kapa Line that I started to think of them as something not solid. I saw the possibilities of sheeted material and then the step to sheet metal was quite obvious to me.

I realized I could manage several of my design considerations, such as light, the possibility to add elements – for example text and also make them less heavy, by working in sheet metal.

One aspect I had been wrestling with was the sheer weight of my objects. The design of my second grave marker would mount up to some 300 kg, and that would be problematic not just from a production and transportation point of view, but it would also exceed the regulations of most cemeteries. This was a problem I had been wrestling with in my process, and one that initially hampered my imagination.

I have learned to not consider the practicality too much in the early stages of a creative process but now I was several months in and this problem, well, weighted on me.

### **The ritual and light aspects, design one**

I do not know exactly when or how the idea of a quadratic block with a bowl shape came to be. This is one of those examples of when an old sketch pops up that show a similar concept to what I was working on now. I might even subconsciously have gotten the idea from an art piece that I have been cycling by several times. A huge rectangular rock carved to a shallow basin, which collects water in a similar way to my design, but I had never realized what it was. I had always seen it as a flat rock and there was never any water in it those times I rode by.

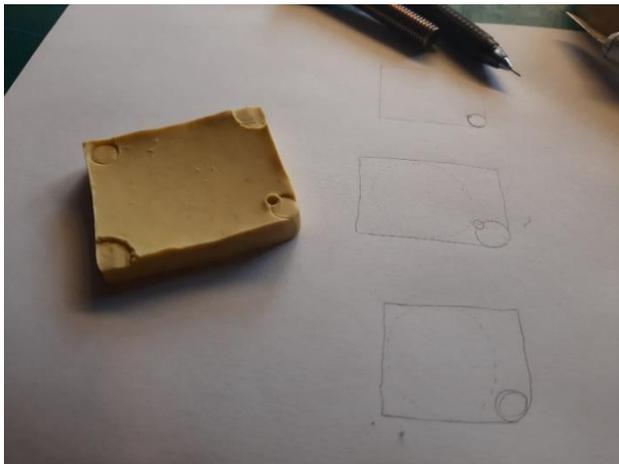
After some extensive Kapa Line cutting and stacking, I had finally found my proportions. The final result was a circa 75 cm tall construction of weathering steel cylinders, boxes and hexagons that formed a narrowing pedestal holding up a rectangular water basin with a parabolic bowl shape. Since the pedestal was hollow, it could hold a lantern and this lantern could also cast light upwards. Over the lantern I therefor choose to place a cylinder with text. The letters would be cut out from the steel and be lit up from the internal light. But since I had my light source, my thoughts went to the terrazzo water bowl. Could I get the light through it and into the water?

Using glass rods cast into terrazzo to transfer light was a thought I had had for some time. It had been with me in the earlier process. Now I did consider casting several of them through the terrazzo and create a "starry sky" in the bottom of the bowl. But I still hadn't really solved how to place the bronze object.



*Figure 8 Kapa Line mock-up of pedestal construction.*

*Figure 9: Trying out designs for object placement. At this stage the bowl was of a rectangular shape. I varied its dimensions and thickness, although in this image it is just a single layer of Kapa Line. The lantern (third shape from the floor) is shorter than in the final design and 7-sided. In the final design it has 6 sides, as it allows for a more symmetrical alternation of solid and cut out panels. Here the grace of a simple parabolic curve was lost.*



*Figure 10: More object placement design experiments. All felt like they were disturbing the overall impression of the shape.*

I sculpted small models in wax trying to figure out how to place the object on the bowl. Some would utilize variations of a small “shelf” that would hold the object. Either a cut out flat portion of the bowl or added material in a corner of it. Neither of these I liked since it would make the construction asymmetrical or “stumpy” in my eye.

I wished that the bowl would have a clear and square shape and that the water in it would create a circle. I opted for making the bowl as flat as I could and simply put the object in a corner. However, after trying this arrangement out in scale the object on the side felt like it was “sliding” into the bowl. I tried putting the object in the centre instead and I liked it a lot better. Remembering my plans with glass rods I came up with the idea of making this central pillar one that transmitted light instead.



*Figure 11 Trying it out in scale. The bowl is the lampshade I later used for making the terrazzo mould. Placing the object on the side it felt like it was sliding, unstable. Placing it in the centre avoided this and gave me the idea of a light transporting rod. The thin lines represent the final square shape the bowl will take.*

At a later point I realized that I could incorporate terrazzo – or any stone for that matter – into the base of the weathering steel construction. I wish to try this out in the future.

The final design of the metal part I constructed in CAD and had it cut out with a CNC water cutter. I did the assembly and construction by welding and bending the cut-out material in a slip roller.







## The sitting aspect, design two

Parallel to this creative process I did literature studies, several books on different aspects of death, burials and human history. I had borrowed them late in the last years course but renewed my loan as many times as was possible, then called the library and got to keep them for an additional three weeks. In one of these the phrase “sitta på hög” (“sit on mound”) intrigued me. It turned out that in older days, it was thought that you could connect with the dead and receive advice and wisdom from your ancestors by sitting on their grave mounds. It gave a boost to my process and it in some way gave me confidence that the sitting aspect of visiting a grave had value. The historical context made the sitting concept a bit more - rich, in lack for a better word. Maybe complete. One part of the idea of sitting is not just to be able to rest your legs, but to be able to have a meditative moment, and instil a sense of place. The historical description showed just that.

I sketched up some varieties of “modern grave mounds”- these didn’t make it very far in the process though.

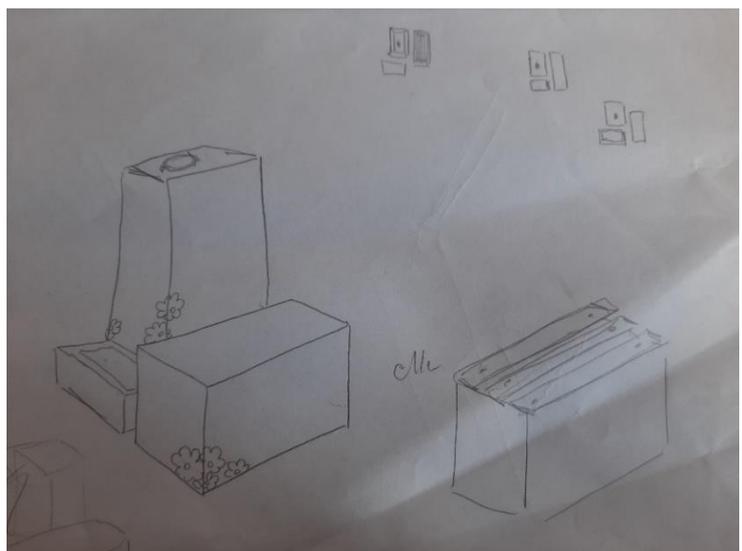
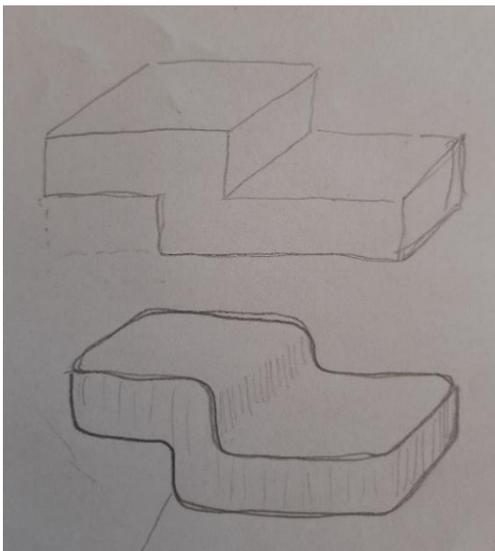
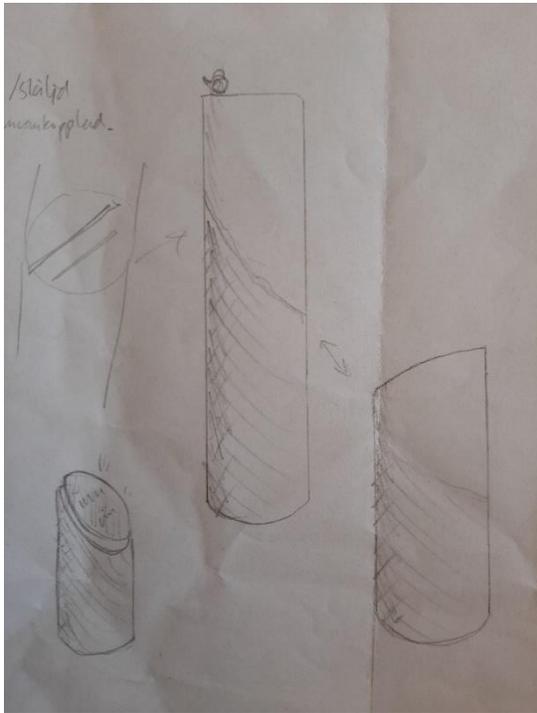


Figure 12: Early sketches on designs for sitting. Figure 13: Midway in the process of a design for sitting

Later in the sketching process my designs moved into separate parts with their separate functions which would make a composition together. As shown above, with a place for object, sitting and flowers (figure 13). I had not worked out how to incorporate text yet except for a traditional and permanent casting or carving into the terrazzo. My main objection to this design was that you would sit sideways or with your back to the bronze object and thus risk losing the feeling of connection I wished to make.



*Figure 14: Later sketch that would allow for sitting, light and placing of object*

Towards the end of the process, I sketched up a three-part grave marker. One solid terrazzo pillar with an object placed on top, one shorter and diagonally cut pillar which would allow for sitting and one lantern with name in a CNC cut out metal plate. I intended to cast them in two different kinds of terrazzo that would create a diagonal line that connected the two.

This was with me for quite some time but got changed when I realized the weight would be over 300 kg and I also had come up with my modular design in my other grave marker.

The final iteration for the second grave marker is now in form of a concept that allow for sitting on one surface next to a pedestal with a bronze object similar to figure 14, minus the small lantern feature. They are placed on steel cylinders that could work in a finalized piece as they are now. But they are

intended as placeholders for a variety of segments like those in the base of the first design. They place the surfaces of the terrazzo in their intended heights. To make the full segmented metal and terrazzo construction of these would be too time consuming, expensive, and impractical for me. I intended the second design to be a simpler one from the start of the assignment, but as they have merged in terms of construction and complexity, I opted for this solution. I plan to produce digital versions of its more complex design versions at a later point.





### Bronze casts for the existing grave

Apart from my two main designs I also made three bronze casts that I wished do display how my idea could work on their own, or by an existing grave. One, the loupe, I placed on a resurfaced gravestone, and the remaining two, the garden spade and kitchen timer, is to be placed either next to a gravestone of any design or could work as memorials on their own in a different setting.





## Construction

The bronze objects were for the most part already made. Previously I had worked on taking forms with silicone, which I transferred to wax and then cast in bronze with the ceramic shell technique. One object, the garden spade, I cast in sand ("green sand"). The loupe I did a sling cast of this semester, with lost wax in jeweller's plaster.

The terrazzo I made by constructing forms and pouring them at home, to later work with drilling, cutting, grinding and polishing on site at a stone masonry firm. The grinding and polishing I did with hand tools while the drilling and cutting were made with heavy machinery by the professionals on site.



*Figure 15: Drilling a terrazzo component to correct diameter.*



## Discussion

It is inherent in the topic of grave markers some very strong social and moral aspects. Death as a theme is very emotional in and of itself, and for the next of kin the funeral and making of the grave marker certainly will be very emotional. Not only has someone close passed away, but in that sorrow practical things like the funeral and grave marker must be arranged. And different people may have different views on how these things should be. Not seldom is a grave marker a compromise that some like less than others.

In this context my grave markers may stand out even further. My grave markers will probably not be the first idea of a compromise of diverging interests. But I do not think that I am designing grave markers for everyone. There is an increasing will of people to arrange their own funerals and choose their own grave markers. (Inger Marie Ruud, 2008) And for those people I believe my grave markers can be an interesting alternative. I think we are more willing to make a novel choice for ourselves than for someone else.

But I do not think that only those who make their own funeral arrangements could see a value in my design. And the concept of adding a cast object to remember someone by - to my design or a more traditional grave marker – I believe is an option many can appreciate.

One object cannot tell the story of a human, but it can function as a starting point of a memory – my intention with the objects is not to tell a human life story – but to make them known and remembered. I believe we will start a memory process when we encounter an object, we know had importance to someone else or we have a memory of them using.

In making a grave marker there will always be a social, ethical and emotional aspect, in my case in large part connected to what object to choose. I believe being humble and show understanding for this will be important.

How much should I myself influence the design? Could I say that something doesn't fit? Should I be involved in the process of choosing objects? In general, I believe that the next of kin or the one that has passed away should have a full influence on these types of things. It is *their* will that is the most important. But at the same time, I have worked with this concept, thought of proportions and know something of which objects that could make a good cast, and which might not. Some kind of guidance will probably always be necessary. But making several design alternatives to be viewed by a customer would probably make the decision making easier.

I don't intend to be the one approaching someone or be "selling my idea". I will try to make my work known through various channels and let the people that see it fit their needs, come to me. I have already approached one stone mason firm which do artistic work as well as grave markers. On their request I will create a bronze cast of an item of their choosing, for them to have on display in their showroom. Because of this positive outcome from a single approach, I believe this is a method I can continue using. Approaching funeral homes in a similar manner I believe can be a way forward too.

There is also the possibility of exhibiting my work in different venues, including those dedicated to funerals and grave markers.

### **Design and construction considerations**

Important in my choices has been the possibilities to personalize the design, both with the choice of object as well as with the main construction. The steel part of the construction will be possible to personalize both by the choice of modules as well as with water jet cut outs of the lantern and possibly other segments.

It will also be possible to choose from a wide range of terrazzo types and incorporate these in some parts of the steel construction. This is my primary reason for choosing terrazzo. It will also lend itself to incorporating glass or bronze, cast into the terrazzo, which is something I will explore further.

In addition rings with text, which could be names and dates as well as other text can be personalized with a variety of fonts – though these need to keep the structural integrity of the whole construction.

I have chosen weathering steel for the construction possibilities it gives but also for the look it will get with time. The rusty but clean surface of weathering steel is in my mind very suitable for this setting. It could however also be painted or be given a surface of enamel – I might explore these options further.

There is a tendency of rust to discolour concrete in an outdoor environment, but this can be managed by letting the rust form before mounting it. My design also have the most important concrete surfaces above the steel. In addition to this, polished terrazzo doesn't discolour as easy as a rugged grey concrete surface.

The terrazzo is a personal choice of mine, but they can be replaced with any kind of stone. This is something my contacts with a stone masonry firm can perform.

I have chosen to work with bronze because to me it is a beautiful material which ages with grace. It works in harsh outdoors conditions. It has been used extensively throughout history for both artistic and practical purposes, including in cemeteries, which I believe “lowers the threshold” for incorporating cast objects in this setting.

Furthermore, I feel that the fact that some of the oldest man-made objects we can find is those made of bronze add to my concept. Bronze can last for 20000 years under the right conditions and maybe some of the bronze objects that get placed on cemeteries will be the last surviving copies of everyday objects that we have around us today.

This sturdiness of bronze I believe make justice to the will of someone who wish to remember a loved one or make themselves remembered for those they loved.

### **Environmental impacts**

The environmental impact of concrete is well known, as it stands for a large proportion of the worlds CO2 emissions. However, there is great progress in reducing these impacts by additives, CO2 capture and other techniques. In my setting I can allow myself to use the most expensive kind of concretes available to reduce the carbon footprint and I intend to keep up to date on any progress in the field.

Concrete also absorbs CO2 and during its lifetime it will absorb as much as was spent making it. This process goes faster the thinner the material is. By working on the design and construction I believe I can reduce the amount of concrete needed and in the same time allow the CO2 recapture process to be faster than in most settings. It is also possible to make concrete from seashells and I am interested in the possibility of making it out of the shells of Japanese oysters, which is an invasive species in my area of residence. Restaurants and the “oyster picking campaigns” that sometimes take place could be sources of these shells.

Bronze is recyclable for thousands of years but the process of melting it produces CO2 emissions. I plan to look into the possibility to use biogas for this process.

Also, steel produces huge CO2 emissions today, but in just a few years the two largest Swedish steel producers will be using hydrogen produced by renewable hydro and wind electricity. I intend to use this steel if possible.

### **Knowledge gained and learning more**

In making this project possible I have received invaluable knowledge from several sources. Last semester I learned how to make silicon moulds from Nicklas Malmström, a professional mould maker. It turned out to be quite a challenge and I know I have much still to learn, but I also know I have someone to turn to for advice.

I have also received advice from Richard Damm, who works professionally with bronze casting and I believe he is someone I can get further advice from. For the terrazzo part I have received extensive help and advice from Anders Lundin at Herrljunga terrazzo. Also invaluable in his knowledge and willingness to share it has the metal art technician Oskar Petterson been.

I know I still have much to learn in all these trades, but I also feel that I have started to build a network that can help me in the future.

Through all this, the one that has the deepest insights and wisdom to share, on life and death, grieving and remembrance, as well as on the actual work process - has been my fiancée Anne Marit Godal. Without her I do not believe I would have managed to achieve the understanding or focus needed to make this work reality.

### **Moving forward**

In the near future I wish to continue develop my concept, primarily when it comes to making the building blocks of my design fully and easily interchangeable with a pre-set fastening system. I also wish to work with making assembly and manufacturing of all my components easier. Making tools and techniques for folding the steel, reusable and sturdy terrazzo forms and developing the casting process of the bronze.

I do intend to make this my future profession and means to live by, and for that I need to look and plan ahead, and then make those plans reality.

I have several aspects to consider.

First to get my visions of design and bronze cast objects for grave markers known to a wider audience, and future clients.

My first step is to work with a webpage that could function both as a means to present my ideas and as a way for others to contact me. This webpage should include descriptions of what these designs and casts is and what my thoughts of them are. I need to formulate both what I see as their strengths and possible risks. For example, which kind of objects that could work well to cast and which would be harder, and thus more expensive or impossible to cast. Also, the possible risks for the original objects themselves to be damaged. This would for example be very low for an object in hard plastic or metal but higher for paper. Textiles could prove hard or impossible and some objects could be affected by the silicone mould release substance. I will also need to be able to present a price range for the casts, so an analysis of my own costs will be needed.

Furthermore I should present ideas on the site, and be prepared to have quite intimate personal talks, on how to think regarding what objects would be suitable for the purpose.

But it is not certain that this is the only way forward. If I work closer to distributors such as stonemasonry firms or funeral homes, they can be the ones that have the first contacts with clients – and refer them to me.

I believe this is at least one thing I wish to do early on, in order to build some connections and knowledge locally. Already this has been the case with one stonemasonry firm, who wish to display my work.

To make contact with these types of firms easier, I could create presentations of my work and concept as flyers that are easy to hand over and have a discussion around. I will also look for venues to show my work such as graveyard display areas.

The production of both my bronze as well as steel and terrazzo components I need to take steps to make on my own. I have none of the machinery needed for the steel production as I graduate. Water cutting I will probably never do on my own so that is more a matter of finding the best company for the job. A slip roller for bending material of the thickness I need is not something I can easily have room or economics for. But for the future I believe buying pipes is the better option in any circumstance. The small amount of bending of material I need for the text in my design I could buy as a service from a metal workshop. In the end it might prove as the better option to let someone else do the whole steel construction part and focus on what interests me the most, taking forms, casting bronze and finding out what item could serve as an object of remembrance to an individual.

Either way, I do think that my primary focus, besides getting my ideas a wider spread, should be on the bronze casts. They are what everything I wish to do relies on. And they work on their own. I am lucky to have a small bronze foundry practically on my doorstep and I hope to work together with them in order to develop my casts. If this fails there are other options, like having my casts done by art cast foundries further away, but this is a much less compelling alternative. I hope to stand in the heat and fire and see my vision come alive first-hand.

### **Presentation discussion**

My opponents for my exam work were Christine Haberman von Hoch and Jorge Manilla. My main opponent was Christine who works with art and design in metal. Her variety of expertise and broad approach to art and design felt very well suited for the field which my work is within.

That was also one thing that she and Jorge explored with their questions: What was the design aspect? What was my artistic expression? And what role in this do the person commissioning my work have?

For me this whole process of several years up until my exam work, when I started what I call *designing* my grave markers, has felt like an artistic one. In the meaning of trying to see, understand and express different aspects of (half) forgotten lives, as well as memory stored in objects and the things we can discover around us. Things we can discover if we just scratch the surface of an abandoned lot or peel of a layer of wallpaper. If one says art is asking questions, and design is answering them, then I believe I have now moved away from art to design. But to me art is not just asking questions, it is also about *seeing*. Seeing things that not everyone discovers in human interactions and minds, seeing connections and seeing past our ordinary interpretation of things. This was how my project started developing. But design is also about seeing. I would argue that design in its core is about seeing, discovering needs – and solving them. This is how I approached the design of my grave markers – very concrete needs to sit and cast light on a name or other important feature of a grave marker. I have designed grave markers, and I believe I have seen something of importance through the questions of my artistic process.

As for my artistic expression: I do not try to express any kind of inner state of myself as an artist in my work - which is how I interpret the question. My experiences through my life, and my artistic – and design – processes, are present. One might argue that my views on life and death is in some part present in it. I personally believe life is what happens once, but affect others and the world indefinitely. I believe every life should be seen, celebrated, and remembered. This is what I try to achieve – and the possibility to sit down without getting your knees wet.

The role of the person commissioning my work is only to be the one to approach the idea of remembering a life by having a cast object on a grave marker, with openness. Not to be an artist or designer, or co-artist or co-designer. Not to have a clear idea of what object to choose or how the grave marker should look. I hope to make these choices easier with the material I produce but, in the end, I do believe a personal talk will always be important. It might be that they have both design and object ready in their mind and if so, and it is technically possible, I have no intention to oppose it. If there are technical issues with their wishes they have not considered, I will address these. But for the most part I would say: the role of the person commissioning my work will be the role of one human, talking to another, about a third.

Another thing that Christine commented about was that she thought I had a spiritual approach and way to talk about my work. In one way I was quite surprised to hear that. Because spirituality has never been a conscious aspect of it. I have mostly seen what

others think of as spiritual as a philosophical and physical understanding of the world. Some feel a spiritual connection to nature, I think of the intricate ways all plants are connected to all other plants, through their roots with webs of fungi. And how our planet was born through the death of ancient stars. I have always with me this view of the world as interconnected. Maybe some of that shines through, and maybe that is what gave me the seed to my grave markers as well.

What does it mean to cast things? This question is something I have been trying to answer earlier in this report, but it did come up in the discussion after my presentation, as well as in other conversations I have had. I believe this is a both intriguing and important question for me to address.

Technically it is just the replication of an item in metal. But in reality, it is not quite true. The replica is not the object. The notebook does not have pages with personal thoughts and the tobacco pouch is never going to contain any hand rolled cigarettes. Something has happened and changed in the process. I believe what has been created is an object which is *intended* to view, relate, and connect to. The original *has* connection to the ones that has a relation to it and its previous owner. But the cast solidifies this connection and can make them and others, even those who do not feel the same connection through the original, to open up a willingness to view the object as something to look at, and then reflect on the life it represents. For this I think the material bronze has the strongest effect. It is already a material that we, through its connotations, are used to look at with an intention to study, reflect and see beneath the surface of.

Furthermore, a cast is not exact in its form compared to the original. It can keep very intricate details in a fantastic way, like the tooth marks on the pencil I cast. But a cast also has small bulges and pits, the surface can get different in spots and the edges a bit less sharp. I feel that this difference actually adds to the experience. It creates a small distance to the original that can make the viewing of it less emotionally intrusive. This, in turn, may help connecting through memory easier and aid with healing. I believe there is a beauty in the way that in the cast, details can be clear and the edges a bit fuzzy. In this way, it resembles how our memory works. And a memory is not sharp copy, it is formed.

Here, also, lies another aspect of the material bronze that I appreciate. When newly cast and polished up for mounting it is shiny and golden in appearance. But as it ages it gets a beautiful living patina that tells of time that has passed. It changes with time and when you revisit the grave you can see this time in the object itself. But if you wish, you may polish it up to its golden shine again. Or just let it bear the marks of your touch, small patches on the edges where the shine comes through. Evidence of your and others visits, and connection, to the one that rests there.

## My final thoughts, and a story of remembrance.

Through this work and the process that lead up to it I have learned something important.

Death is not an abstraction.

It is an overwhelming change of life, surrounded by very concrete experiences.  
Concrete needs everyone has by a grave

To lighten a candle. In the rain.

To lighten up the name of the lost one.

To have a way to visit and stay by it, without having your knees aching and wet.

The strange thing about death  
is that although everything has changed,  
all *things* are still there.

The belongings used by the lost one.

Everyday objects that carry memories.

My grave markers are built on the idea of casting objects  
with a personal connection to the one that has passed away.

I wish to show that these metal cast objects can make a grave marker more personal  
and add a feeling of connection  
or remembrance of the person it belonged to.

We can observe the need of personalization in a lot of grave markers these days.

They are often decorated, and items are placed.

Personal teddy bears or bird figurines - made in China.

I wish to address - and meet this need to personalize

– in the most respectful way.

To do so, I've been working with my hands, with a metal  
that can last for millennia.

Bronze can tell us of the past.

From the bronze age we have found tools, weapons and god figurines, used as grave  
offerings.

Therefore, we know, What was important to the people back then.

We know about things that existed, thousands of years ago.

Now days, our objects are often made in fragile materials, such as plastic.

What traces will remain from our time? This is a plastic kitchen timer, cast in bronze.



To capture everyday objects in bronze  
do not only create a copy.  
The metal adds an edge to the experience.

Compared to the original,  
the blurry edge can represent the process of remembering.  
Because a memory is not a sharp copy,  
it is formed.  
In the bronze castings, the details can be visible,  
but there may also be small pieces missing.  
Like in memory.

The bronze could add another layer of contemplation,  
compared to if we were to just put the original object on the grave.

You may wonder, why have I chosen to make these grave markers?

Well, behind each of the cast objects you have seen,  
there is a personal story.  
A story of a human life lived.  
I want to reflect these life stories. Honor them. Make them last.

To end my writings, I would like to share  
the story of one of these objects.  
it is the story of a little girl and her grandmother.  
The now grown up grand-daughter told me:

*"My grandmother was like an extra mother to me.  
She had time for me when everyone else were away, working late  
or when school had ended for summer.*

*Everywhere and all the time  
she had this purse with her.*

*To her appearances were important. To look and behave properly.  
And in a pretty leather handbag, she had a pretty leather purse, and in that purse,  
she kept her hand rolled cigarettes.*

*I used to roll them for her.*

*When it was dinner - or when we had guests  
- we used to sit by the living room table.  
But when it was just her and me, we sat by the small one in the kitchen.*

*She would do her crosswords and I  
tried my hardest to roll those cigarettes.  
It was really hard.*

*They had to be rolled in a special way and tucked in the edges so no tobacco leaves would be  
stuck to her lipstick.  
I remember the feeling of... grown up... mastery when I managed it for the first time.  
I think I was six years old.*

*When my grandmother died, this well used purse was one of things that I got.  
And it is the one thing  
that brings out the most vivid  
and true memories of her.*

*One of the most important people of my own life. "*



Behind every gravestone you will ever see,  
there are stories like this.

Stories of life - to be remembered.

## References

Gustavsson, A. 2003. *Gravstenar i Norge och Sverige som symboler för känslor, tankar och idéer i vår egen tid*. NOVUS

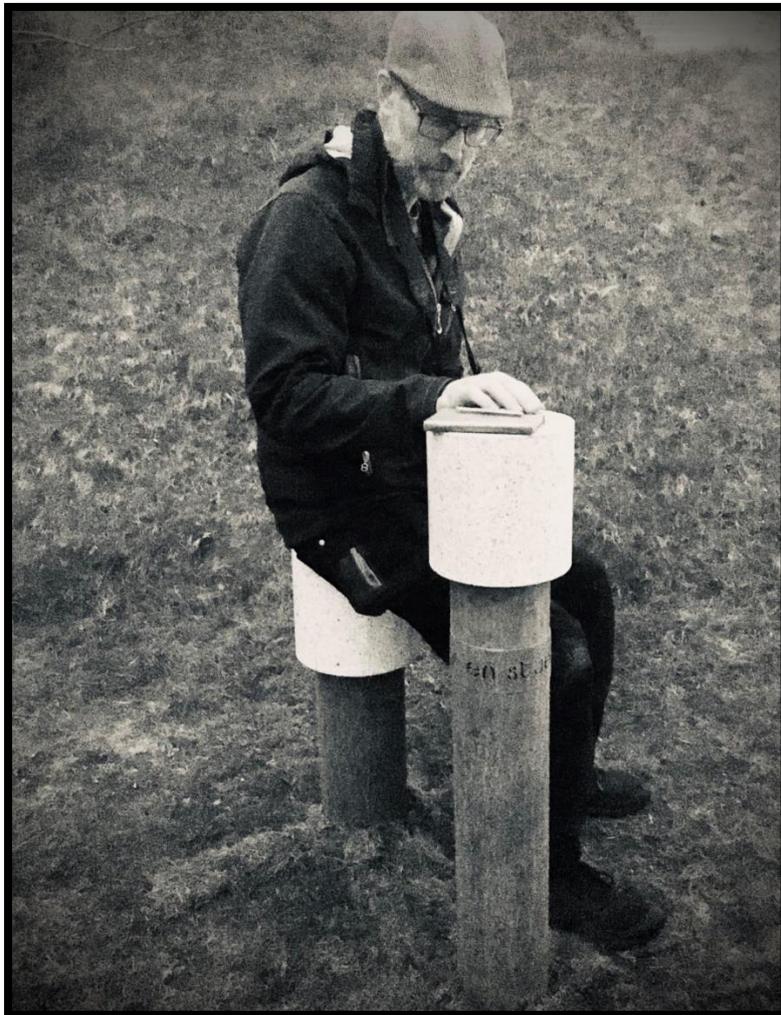
Inger Marie Ruud, 2008: *Den som dør får se*

## Picture index

All photos by the author if not otherwise declared. Photo editing and enhancement Anne Marit Godal and Petter Lundström (in co-operation).

Figure 1. Candido, E. (2020). *Photo of grave with personal objects in Molkom, Sweden*. [Digital photo]

Figures 2 & 3. Gustavsson, A. *Photos of grave markers, from the book "Gravstenar I Norge och Sverige som symboler för känslor, tankar och idéer I vår egen tid"* [Digital scans] (With permission)



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Photo: Anne Marit Godal