Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever

– an act of mourning through textile craft

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– an act of mourning through textile craft
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Abstract

Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever is an collaborative exam project that centers around the loss of biodiversity in the Swedish forests, and examines how mourning can serve as an artistic approach to deal with those losses.

There is an ongoing, polarized debate about forest management in Sweden, depicting a conflict between green technology and economic development, and the protection and wellbeing of forest species. The challenges for humanity are real, but so are the ones for the non-humans. This project is trying to *stay with the trouble* as Donna Haraway puts it, embrace the friction of our time and address the existential layers of the debate. How are we (as in humans) to live with ourselves and the extinction of species we are causing, and how are we (as in all species) to live on together?

By using textile craft as a method, we try to give form to humanity's ambivalent relationship with the rest of the ecosystem. The loss of forest individuals is processed as an act of mourning, which allows us to artistically channel our own feelings and share them with other people. Through hand tufted sculptures and spatial settings we approach the death of species as a farewell, an act of violence and a chain of production.

In the tension between these perspectives our inner conflicts are brought up to the surface; our romantic notions of nature, anger towards the forest industry and guilt for being part of the exploit. *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* seeks to raise awareness for the forest species, question the hierarchy between humans and non-humans, and create a sense of community for others in need of mourning.

Keywords: forest species, red-listed, biodiversity, death, mourning, humanizing, guilt, textile art, tufting, tactility, installation, ceremony, collaboration

Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever är ett kollaborativt examensprojekt som kretsar kring den pågående artdöden i svenska skogar, och undersöker om sorgearbete kan vara en konstnärlig metod för att bearbeta och gestalta förlusten av biologisk mångfald.

Det pågår en polariserad skogsdebatt i Sverige, där grön teknologi och ekonomisk utveckling ofta står i konflikt med att skydda och främja artrikedomen i skogarna. Utmaningarna är stora, både för oss människor och för de andra arterna, och det är svårt att inte fastna i uppgivenhet eller lockas till enkla lösningar. I det här projektet försöker vi att stå kvar i friktionen, *stay with the trouble* som Donna Haraway uttrycker det, och ta ett existentiellt perspektiv på slaget om skogen. Hur ska vi (människor) kunna leva med oss själva och den utrotning vi bär skuld till, och hur ska vi (alla arter) kunna leva vidare tillsammans?

Med textilt konsthantverk som metod, gestaltar vi mänsklighetens ambivalenta förhållningssätt till resten av ekosystemet. Vi möter förlusten av skogslevande individer i en personlig sorgeprocess, för att kanalisera våra egna känslor och för att dela dem med andra människor. Genom handtuftade skulpturer och rumsliga iscensättningar närmar vi oss den oundvikliga döden på olika sätt; som ett farväl, som en våldshandling, som ett led i en produktion.

I skärningspunkten mellan dessa perspektiv kommer våra egna inre konflikter upp till ytan; våra romantiska föreställningar om naturen, ilskan gentemot skogsindustrin, och skammen över vår egen delaktighet i deras exploatering. *Med Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* försöker vi ge röst åt de rödlistade arterna, ifrågasätta hierarkin mellan dem och oss människor och skapa ett sammanhang för andra, som likt oss är i behov av sörja deras bortgång.

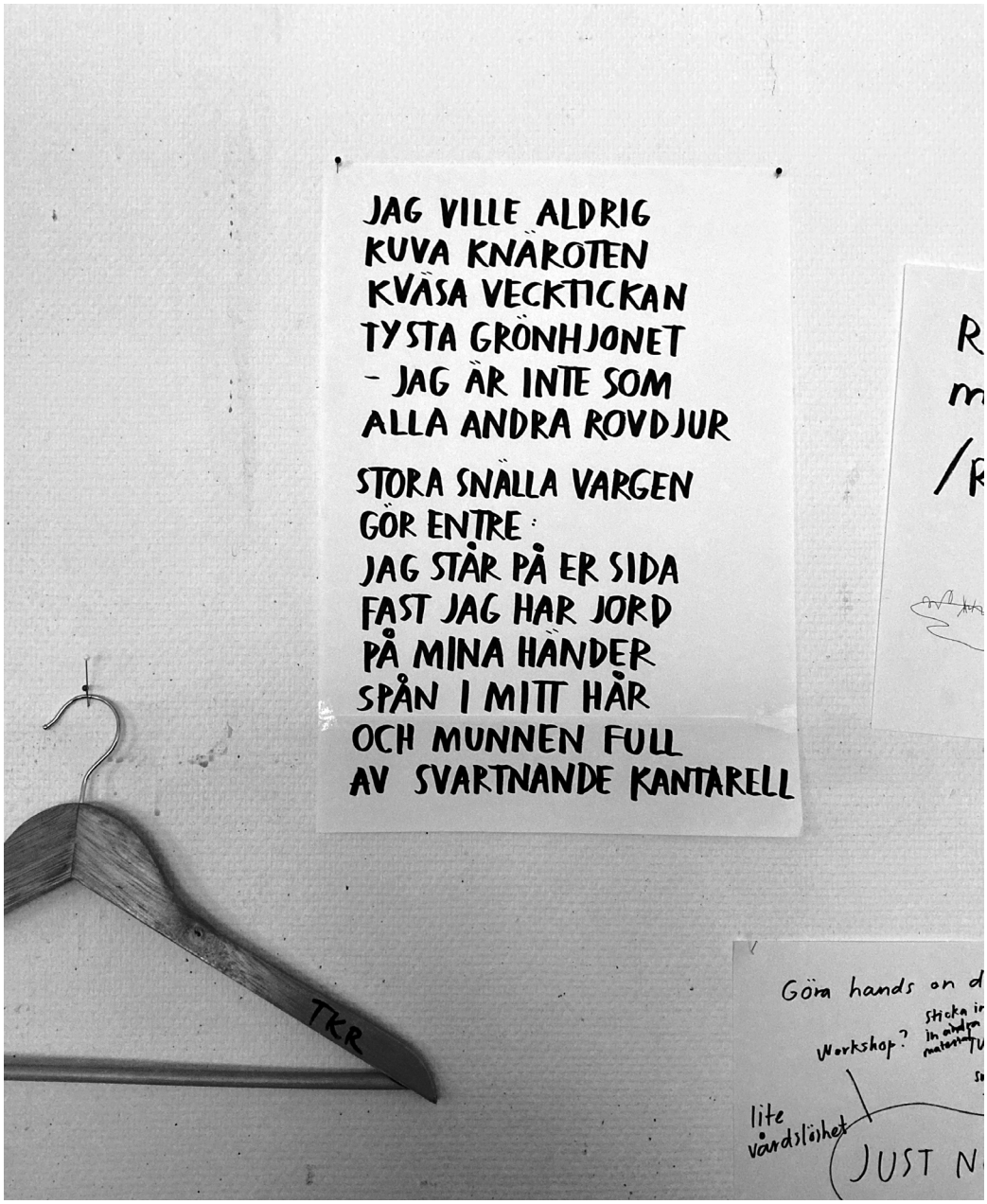
I Background

II Result of process

III Discussion

IIII Final notes

Figure 1: Poem by me, as part of mourning process (for translation see next page)



I never wished to
conquer the Creeping lady's-tresses
crush the Crust fungus
silence the Green longicorn
I am not
like the other predators
The old wolf appears all gentle and nice:
– I am on your side
although I have soil on my hands
sawdust in my hair
and a mouth full
of Blackening chantarell

I Background

Introduction

Charlotte + I = color

Location: Dals Långed

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Purpose, Objective & Questions

Approach

Introduction

My artistic practice is founded on collaborative methods; thinking, talking and making together with my colleague Charlotte Ewing (b. 1986). We have worked closely together since 2015, starting out as a design studio but gradually positioned ourselves as a textile-oriented artist duo, based in Gothenburg in Sweden. By finding mutual intentions through an ongoing dialogue and using different call-and-response methods, we are shaping expressions that represent the both of us in various materials and mediums.

We decided to apply for the master programme Applied Arts and Design, Textile-Body-Space, at HDK-Valand Campus Steneby, after losing a competition for a big public commission in the summer of 2020. The protocol from the jury showed that we lost with four points only; 144 versus 148. While Ewing and I used our designer perspective to take care of all the requirements of the commission, the winning artist just went with their own vision completely cocky and carefree. I did not like the vision itself, but I really envied the integrity it displayed. Entering this education together was therefore a way for us to make time to develop our practice into a more artistic one. Besides getting more practical craft skills and theoretical knowledge, we also wanted to challenge ourselves with a more subjective and vulnerable approach to our work.

The intention was always to do a collaborative master project, and we began formulating a theme for it during the first semester by digging into the Swedish forest debate and loss of biodiversity. What first appeared quite a political topic, soon turned out to have emotional, tactile, spatial and even existential layers to it. Depending on perspective, the very word forest seemed to hold many different meanings; a resource with prospects to produce capital and green technology, a habitat for myriads of birds, insects, fungus and lichens, or a retreating place for spiritual experiences and burned out urban people. The vast landscape of evergreens displayed an ambivalent relationship between human and nature that sucked us in completely. Two years passed by quickly, while we were exploring color expression, spatial composition and bodily interaction, as well as continuing to develop the theoretical framework and artistic direction for our project.

This report aims to capture our process which culminated in the making of a craft-based, spatial body of work called *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever – an act of mourning through textile craft*. This is where the digging brought us. The more time we spent with the forest, the louder our own emotions became. We were sad about the large number of species whose life conditions in the forests were threatened, angry at

the forest companies responsible for it, and we felt guilty for being part of that human exploit ourselves, as consumers of wood material, paper cups, biofuel, cellulose fabric and more.

We decided to approach our work as an act of mourning, a way to deal with and channel our personal feelings, but also to find an artistic expression that could capture the very essence of the conflicting times we live in.

To describe the different layers of the project I have chosen to structure my text thematically rather than chronologically. For readers who prefer a linear story that might seem messy sometimes, but it reflects what my creative process looks like – I rarely remember the exact order of things, but move back and forth between memories, current impressions and future aspirations, trying to find connections that make sense of it all.

Some parts of the report are notebook passages, and to help navigate I have added dates to these sections and set them in *italic*. I have also incorporated parts of recorded and transcribed dialogues between Ewing and I, to share some of the conversations that are so important in our practice. In the dialogues I use C and H as short for our first names, Charlotte and Hannah.

Understanding the collaboration we have, is also key to understanding this text. I will often talk about intentions, decisions and struggles in terms of *we*. In our practice, the line that separates my own being from Ewing often gets blurry, sometimes by habit, but mostly intentionally so. We make and think together, which means leading each other through the continuous shifts between doubts and determination; getting stuck and getting grumpy, moving on into moments of flow and epiphany.

However, we are writing two separate reports and apart from *Background* and *Purpose, Goal & Questions* which are partly based on our mutual project description, we are trying to provide two different voices about the same artistic work. My hope is that these two texts when read in parallel will contribute to a deeper understanding of collaborative processes within the artistic field.

Figure 2: Myrsteg, one of the prints from Mörkermyren

Figure 3: Fláajökull

Figure 4: Detail from We Were Here, objects made mainly from scrap material

Charlotte + I = color

I usually call myself a textile artist, as textile materials and techniques are closest at hand for me. They enchant me with their tactile properties, their relation to the body and the room, and most importantly how easily they adapt to different kinds of color studies. Color and perception is a central theme in my artistic practice, used to directing different atmospheres, investigating light absorption and reflection of various surfaces, or playing with connotations that connect certain materials with certain hues.

The interest in color expression is also something that brought me and Ewing together and shaped our collaboration early on. We met each other in Gothenburg at the BA programme in Design at HDK-Valand (Academy of Art and Design) 2011-2014, and began collaborating the year after our graduation. At first we explored color in the format of large scale screen printing and print design, establishing a naivistic and graphic form language with very bright and saturated hues. Orange and blue was a recurring combination, from our first print collection *Mörkermyren* 2016 (fig. 2) to the print *Fláajökull* made in 2020 (fig. 3). But our interest in visual expression was too general to just stick to one medium and over the years we jumped between illustrations and murals, costume and set design, installations and public art commissions.

Figure 5-6: Cabinet, carpet sculpture and casted soap from We Were Here

Our work gradually became more and more spatial, and yet our approach to color remained quite graphical. *Fláajökull* was part of the bigger project *We Were Here* (2020), a mixed media installation based on memories and experiences from our artist residency in Iceland 2019. Although materiality was important to us when creating the pieces, looking at the photos (fig. 4-6) of them I feel that the essence of their expression can be equally captured in a two dimensional picture, an impression that I think is enhanced by our use of distinctive colors.

We Were Here displayed not only a variety of objects and mediums, but also a mix of elaborate craft and efficient assemblage – from advanced screen printing by hand to objects found at a recycle station in Reykjavik; spray painted, glued and stitched together in a considerate but still simple manner. I really enjoyed this playful method of making, however, it made me realize that the only craft technique I was completely confident in was screen printing and this began to bother me. As Ewing and I decided to study again, learning new craft skills became one of our goals with the education, and tufting was on the top of our list.

Tufting is a technique to create rugs by shooting yarn through a framed canvas and forming a fringe on the other side (fig. 7-8). Several threads can be shot as one bundle, allowing colors and materials to blend together. One can also alter the length of yarn for a variation in texture; making a dense 16 mm moss-like surface or a long hairy fringe that bends in different directions. In February 2022 Ewing and I had our first encounter with the tuft gun, and I was almost taken aback with its directness. I pressed the needle to the canvas, pulled the trigger, and instantly it spitted out a streak of furry color on the other side. It was not only a pleasant experience, being a beginner and not able to steer the stitching properly or manage the speed of it. But as I learned to handle the gun, I also felt that engaging this closely with a material is something that I have been missing for a long time.

Moreover, tufting opened up for completely new ways to work with color and a new meaning to the statement of German painter and Bauhaus teacher Josef Albers (1888-1976), that color is constantly elusive and its properties are very much determined by quantity, placement and spatial context. In his book *Interaction of color* (1963), Albers gives two examples of this that are very easily applied to tufting; first optical blending where for instance dots of blue and dots of yellow merge into green in the eye of the viewer, and second the Bezold effect where white details in a pattern surface makes the background color appear lighter and vice versa. (Albers, 1963).

As the color of each individual thread interacts with the others they blend optically and create new nuances, depending on the view distance. But the perception of these colors are not merely a question of the dyes of the yarns; materials such as wool and linen reflect the light differently, and various lengths of the fringe display different parts of the yarn. Short fringe emphasizes the cross-section of the yarn and longer fringes show more of the external surface of the threads. I find this incredibly fascinating, as it constantly challenges not only my visual perception, but also my preferences of certain colors – colors I might not enjoy individually suddenly come alive when they join in a bundle with other ones.

As both Ewing and I completely fell in love with this new technique, we decided to take the time during our exam project to further explore its possibilities. The choice was very intuitive for the both of us, and for me mainly based on its relationship to color. But it also has a deeper connection to the theoretical background of our project, and I will come back to this later on.

Figure 7: Tuft gun
Figure 8: Tufting at the collective workshop KKV in Gothenburg

Figure 9-10: Performantive photo session in Iceland

Location: Dals Långed

There is no doubt that studying in the middle of the forest has steered the direction of our exam work, but we did not end up here randomly either. For quite some time now we have had a particular interest in the ambivalent relationship between human and nature, and we often place ourselves in a certain context as an artistic method. An example of this is *We Were Here*, where the month we spend in Iceland and the experiences we had during our stay became the very core of our project. Being artists in residency and tourists at the same time, we played on that double identity by conducting a performative photography session in dramatic sceneries, where we pretended to examine and collect samples from the delicate environment (fig. 9-10).

It was an ambivalent experience, as we felt rather guilty when stepping on the soft lava stones with our freshly bought hiking boots. But using ourselves and our own identity as a material enabled us to closely examine the friction we were interested in: the human attraction to environments perceived as exotic and untouched, and how that perception shapes interaction, storytelling and consumption of the very same places.

Something changed with this project. Having a more subjective approach made way for more interesting questions, and with exposing our own behaviors came more vulnerability. We were finally taking risks, and I liked it! But *We Were Here* also made me aware of how the gap between human and nature has been a recurring theme in our practice for a long time, spanning from the deeply existential to mundane everyday phenomenons, and with these insights I entered my education at Campus Steneby.

The master programme Applied Arts and Design is located in Dals Långed, a village of less than 1500 people in the small and sometimes forgotten Swedish region Dalsland. The campus is situated on a slope facing the lake and Dalsland's canal, surrounded by hills of evergreen forests. It is a beautiful place which I have come to love, but moving here was not the obvious choice for me. I grew up in a sad little village called Trekanten in southern Sweden, was bullied for years and fled to the city as soon as I could in search of more opportunities and creative, like-minded people. Ever since I have had mixed feelings about the countryside, the appeal of being close to the forest on one side and fear of isolation on the other. However, Ewing felt very strongly that the particular location of this master programme would benefit our focus and personal growth, so I chose to take a leap of faith and rely on her determination.

After 10 years in Gothenburg without daily interactions with the forest or insight to the forest industry, moving here was almost like an awakening. At first, I was filled with joy of reconnecting with nature, experiencing the soothing effects of wandering in the woods, climbing hills and listening to the sounds of birds and tiny insects. Then I started to notice some industrial trails – tracks in the ground of machines, a newly appeared clearcutting field and old, semi-abandoned factory buildings that once were part of a flourishing paper industry. At the same time Ewing and I were consuming lots of documentaries, podcasts, books and articles circling around the future of the Swedish forest.

One of them was *Slaget om skogen* [The battle of the forest], a documentary series that depicted a polarized debate where climate change, biodiversity and economic development seemed to be in conflict with each other and where the forest biologist Sebastian Kirppu (b. 1973) taught me the expression *virkesåker* [timber field], as a way to describe the most common practice in Swedish forestry; clearcutting and replantation (Brohult, 2021).

My perception of the forest gradually changed. I saw perfect rows of pines and spruces, endless wood plantations organized by humans. I noticed that some areas in the forest were silent, not silent as in the low symphony of chirping and rustling, but lacking actual noise. Was the forest even a forest anymore? Or was it already deleted? Something was brewing in both me and Ewing, we were angry with how politicians and companies handled the forest, frustrated about how little impact we had as individuals and at the same time we felt guilty for just being human and being part of the exploitation.

The loss of biodiversity

– Which species do you miss?
The question is posed by Karl Hedin (b. 1949), one of Sweden's biggest private forest owners whose company has a turnover of 6 billion SEK, during an interview with the journalist Lisa Röstlund (b. 1979) for her book *Skogslandet: en granskning* [The Forest Land: an investigation] (2022). The question above turns out to be rhetorical and Hedin follows up with his own view on the matter; if Sweden has 65.000 species and a few of them were lost due to forest management, would it really matter to the whole ecosystem? He knows more species than the average person and yet he cannot name more than a fraction of them (Röstlund, 2022, p.219-225).

Hedin describes an ecosystem of abundance and his conclusion is that birds, insects, mosses, lichens and fungus exist in such endless variety that humanity can actually afford to lose some. And we are about to lose a lot of them.

According to SLU Artdatabanken [Swedish Species Information Centre], Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (n.d.), there are 5500 species in Sweden whose life conditions are currently threatened. They are red-listed, with a status ranging from Near Threatened (NT) to Critically Endangered (CR) or even Regionally Extinct (RE). 43 percent of the red-listed species has the forest as their main habitat and the rapid death of species is a consequence of harsh forestry, as pointed out by Röstlund (2022).

Figure 11: The range of the red-list

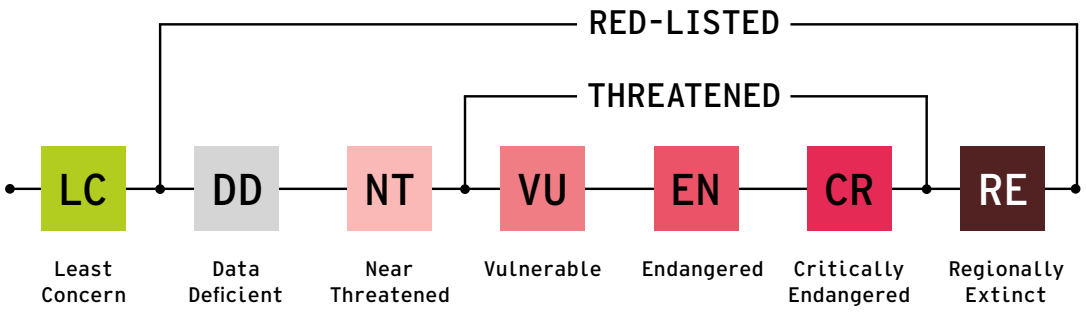
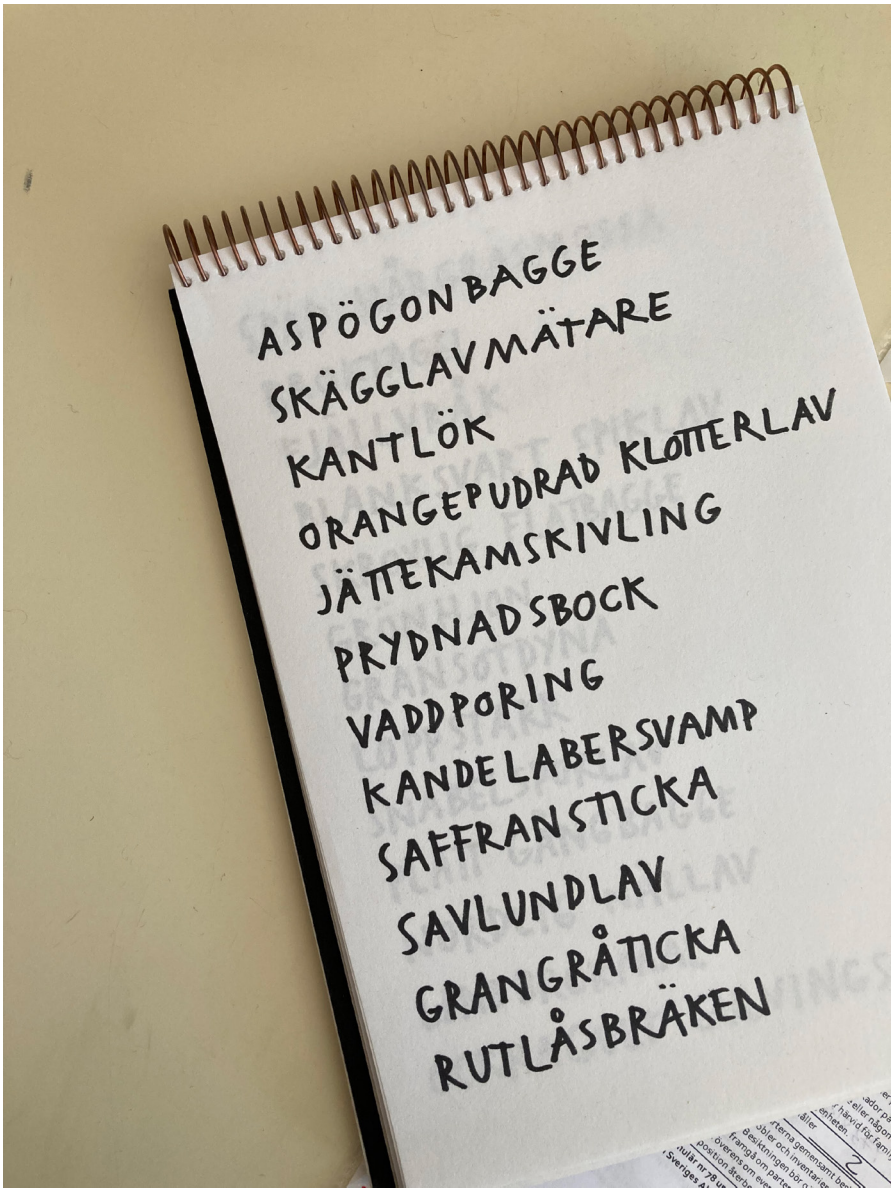


Figure 12: Notebook with names of red-listed species



Humanizing as artistic approach

Let us go back to Hedin's question; which species do you miss? There's an ambivalence here that caught Ewing's and my attention – the question suggests a relationship to nature where other species rely on humans' sentimental feelings towards them. This perception often results in inequality where many species become victims of human production, being either a resource themselves or a collateral damage in the process. But it also holds the possibility to evoke empathy and compassion.

For a year now, the rapid death of species in the Swedish forests has been on our mind, a list of their names pinned to our noteboard. *Prydnadsbock. Fläckporing. Puderspindling. Knärot. Raggtaggsvamp. Styvfoting. Savlundlav*. Over time we have developed feelings of sadness, grief and guilt over their situation, but also a tendency to humanize them. Do they suffer? Do they even realize what is going on? Their human names have claims, they insist to be recognized and identified with. But what happens if Ewing and I try to take on that responsibility?

Looking up the word *humanize* in the Oxford English Dictionary (2022) the first definition reads "To make human; to portray or endow with human characteristics, qualities, or attributes; to represent in human form; to adapt to human use." No doubt the mechanism of humanizing can serve different purposes, but it is for sure a powerful thing. An example of this is how humanization of nature has started to become a legal tool in several countries such as Bolivia, New Zealand, Uganda, Mexico and the USA. It is a recognition of nature's rights where ecosystems like rivers, forests and mountains are treated as legal subjects with an intrinsic value, meaning they have the right to a lawyer in court. This global movement and legal shift uses a man-made system to make human and nature coexist on more equal terms (The National Museums of World Culture, n.d.).

Ewing and I found this very encouraging and it inspired us to bring Prydnadsbock, Fläckporing, Knärot and the others into some sort of human context. While jurisdiction effectively addresses matters of rights and obligations, art might bring other dimensions to the ambivalent human-nature relationship. Could humanizing also work as an artistic approach to evoke empathy and awareness for the red-listed species?

Mourning with tactility

With humanizing as a first step to connect ourselves with these forest individuals, we consciously steered our process towards a subjective and introspective investigation, similarly to the way we worked with *We Were Here*. Using our own conflicted feelings regarding the loss of biodiversity, as a material, felt more interesting and honest than observing the development in Sweden from a safe distance. Besides this, the more time we spent reading, listening and watching news and debates related to this topic, and the more time we spent in the woods surrounding us, the louder our own emotions became. They claimed to be channeled somehow, and we realized that we had entered a mourning process.

Moving forward in this, we started to look at our own Swedish traditions of mourning and the rituals surrounding the passing of a community member. Louise Hagberg (1868-1944) was an ethnologist who during the first decades of the 20th century made extensive research about Swedish folkloristic traditions and beliefs related to death, resulting in the book *När döden gästar* [When Death Pays a Visit] (1937). The book reveals a rich variety of local practices, but a common trait is that the rituals embraced both practical, emotional and existential issues. Death was something that brought the community together, through coffin-making, preparation of the bodies, vigils and funerals – death united people.

One example of this was the courtesy to *see the dead*. All village members were supposed to come by the estate to pay their respects and support the family. During the visit it was quite common to touch the dead body, to confront one's fear of ghosts and prevent being haunted by the deceased (Hagberg, 1937).

Death in contemporary Sweden however, is being handled by institutions such as retirement homes, hospitals, funeral homes and mortuaries, thus it seems to have lost some of its tactility along the way. To actually see the dead body is now a matter for the closest relatives, and hosting vigils is a very rare phenomena. Reading the testimonies from Hagberg's book, death today seems very abstract and lonely in comparison, and we began to wonder if that also makes it harder to understand and deal with losses.

One example of how textiles can re-introduce tactility to the mourning process is the work of Swedish artist and researcher Birgitta Nordström (b. 1963). For many years she has made hand woven palls (textile covers for coffins) and observed their role in funerals. In Nordström's licentiate thesis *I ritens rum – om mötet mellan tyg och människa* [In a Room of Rites – Cloth Meeting Human] (2016), she describes how

Figure 13: Close-up on a tufted surface

the soft textile surface invites people to repeatedly touch and stroke the coffin when saying goodbye during the ceremony.

Nordström's work shows how the physical contact stimulated by a tactile material, can channel our feelings for the deceased. This inspires us to use textile craft in a similar way, as a bridge that might make the death of the red-listed species more real and relatable, especially to the urban majority in Sweden that normally have very little interaction with them. If the loss of biodiversity is translated into a physical experience; if we give form to their departure, it could maybe help not only ourselves but also other humans to connect with the forest inhabitants and their current situation.

To further explore this idea, we have chosen to work with hand-tuft as our main expression in this project. From our experience, tufts are exceptionally tactile and people passing by cannot resist running their fingers through the hairy surface. We believe this could be an important quality to our work; when the tufted medium is taking the role of the dying species, the material itself also carries potential for touch and affection. Could this interaction translate into empathy, and change the general perception of the forest as abstract nature to a complex cluster of individual organisms?

Purpose, Objective & Questions

To summarize, our purpose with this project is to examine how mourning can be applied to an artistic process, in order to deal with the loss of biodiversity. By exploring and giving form to our own grief, we are taking an existential perspective on the Swedish forest debate, asking: how are we (as in humans) to live with ourselves, and how are we (as in all species) to live together?

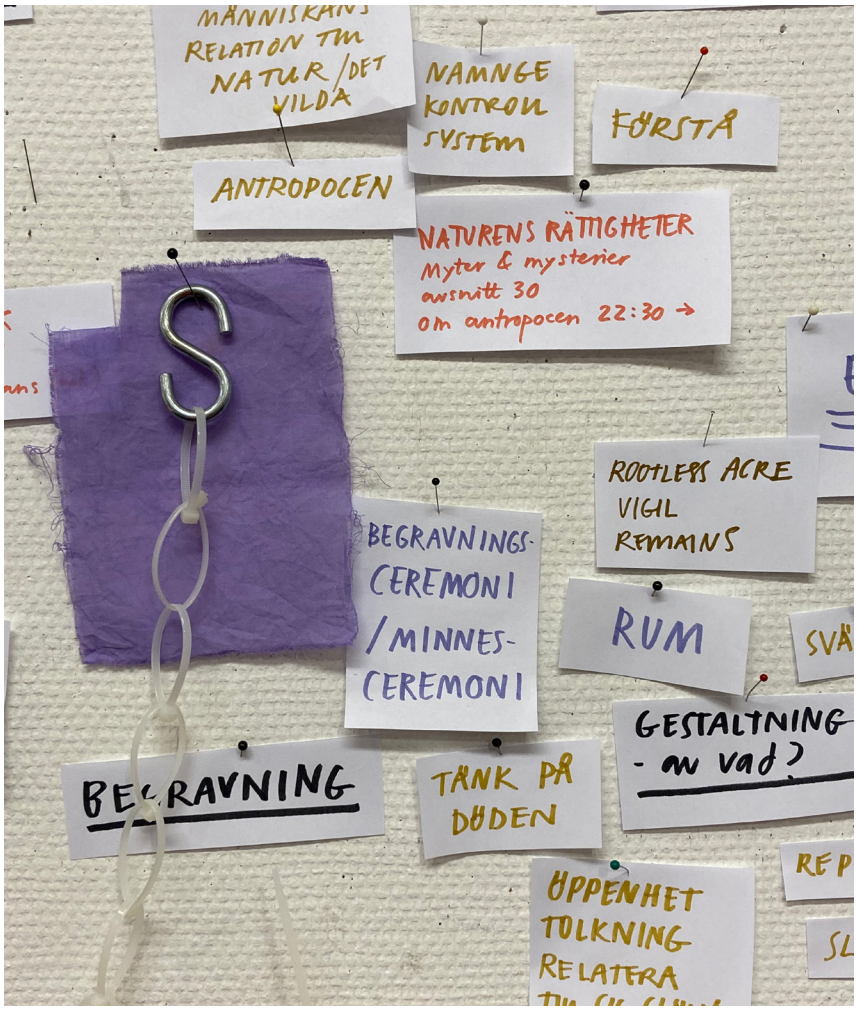
We believe vulnerability is key in order to find something that resonates with other people, and so we are using our own sorrow, anger and guilt as a material. Through a tactile craft experience we are trying to humanize the other species, empathize and discuss the conditions for us co-existing.

The more concrete goal is to create an art installation, a spatial body of work based on tufted sculptures. The process of making allows us to channel our own emotions and find a language for our grief, while the installation aims to communicate the acts of mourning to other people and create a sense of community around this topic.

Questions:

- How can humanizing be applied as an artistic approach to evoke empathy and awareness for the red-listed species?
- How can textile art make death more tangible to humans?

Figure 14: Part of the noteboard in our shared workspace



Approach

Our approach can be divided in four parts; making, sketching spatially, developing the theoretical framework and collaborating. In the making part we are focusing mainly on tufting, using different methods to develop our craft skills and find a form language for our project. The spatial work is carried out in parallel to the making through various workshops, so that the spatial sketching can inform the tufting process and vice versa. The theoretical part is developed in dialogue with each other, but it also includes personal choices of literature that can serve our individual writing.

Our collaborative methods are the very foundation for this project; we are thinking, talking and making together. Everything Ewing and I do is based on our ongoing dialogue, and every craft experiment and spatial workshop is carried out by the two of us. Working like this makes it often hard to describe our different roles, but in this report I will try to visualize and discuss the characteristics of our collaboration.

Making

- call-and-response; we are tufting on the same canvas and swapping places with each other every day
- intuitive tufting versus planned layout; challenging ourselves by making choices in the actual craft process, rather than designing all details beforehand
- limited color library with many nuances; the color selection becomes a framework that encourages intuition
- choice of fibers; try out different yarns to experiment with visual and tactile qualities

Sketching spatially

- using readymades and scrap material to get started, so that the spatial sketching and the tufting process can influence each other
- trying out different ways to place or hang the tufted pieces, to find sculptural ways to work with tufting
- developing additional components in the actual setting – what support does the tufts need in order to communicate with an audience?
- experimenting with performance, sound and interaction, as a potential additional layer to the installation

Additional theory and references

- Hannah Arendt, *Organized guilt and universal responsibility*
- Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*
- Johanna Gustavsson, *Jag gör vi varje dag*

Collaborative methods

- an ongoing dialogue between Ewing and I; record parts of it and transcribe for the report
- communication in text; mind maps, writing together and a mutual log book on Google drive
- making and tufting together side by side, document our process in photo and video
- external collaboration with a musician to introduce sound to our project

II Result of process

Connecting with all critters

Tufting

The room and the ceremony

In this chapter I will describe the development of our project from four angles – theory, tufting, spatial settings and collaboration, focusing on our work during the spring semester 2023. But as mentioned in the introduction, *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* has been an ongoing process for almost two years, and therefore some examples from earlier during the education seems necessary in order to better explain the artistic choices we have made.

In *Connecting with all critters* I elaborate on the theoretical framework for this project; clarifying how my approach to the forest theme has shifted during the process. *Tufting* describes the making part and our craft collaboration; how Ewing and I are exploring color, material, volume and scale together through practical experiments in the tuft workshop. *The room and the ceremony* is an overview of our spatial and performative investigation, where we try to contextualize our work and make it relatable to an audience.

Although I have chosen to place the sections in this order they are still to be seen as parallel tracks, which also have been a conscious approach for us, to make sure that the different aspects of craft, space, and theory can influence each other along the way.

The collaboration Ewing and I have infuses everything we do and therefore I have decided not to talk about it in a separate section, but rather incorporate it in the whole text. Sometimes it is present in pictures of us working practically, sometimes in the descriptions of the decisions we make together and sometimes I just shift between *I* and *we* in the text, to differentiate between reflections we have made together and reflections I have done on my own (mostly when writing).

To visualize our dialogue which is so fundamental for our practice, I have also added a few parts of the recordings we made during the project. These are marked with dates and presented both in Swedish and English, as Swedish is the language we communicate with.

Figure 15-17: Hand-sewn textile banners, exhibited at Nääs Konsthantverk November 2021

Connecting with all critters

> The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places (Haraway, 2016, p. 1)

Donna Haraway (b. 1944) is an American theorist and in her book *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) she is rethinking human relationships with the earth and all of its inhabitants, in the context of the current climate and biodiversity crisis. The idea of staying with the trouble aims at being truly present in a difficult time and is Haraway's response to two very common but one-sided attitudes; the faith in techno-fixes; the optimistic notion that technology itself will come to rescue, and the cynical position that the game is already over (Haraway, 2016).

When Haraway encourages me to make trouble, anger is my starting point. It is my initial reaction to any kind of discrimination, done either deliberately, due to neglect or even lack of knowledge. Consequently, when we started to approach the forest and discovered the many injustices human behavior causes there, our first way to channel our feelings was by making protest banners (fig. 15-17).

Made from used fabrics; bought, found and inherited, they conveyed a fictional story about a diverse group of people, hiding in an old summerhouse and stirring up a rebellion against a complete deletion of the forest. Drawing from the ominous present we had begun speculating about a dystopian future, and we started looking for potential human companions in our concerns. The moose hunters, the mushroom pickers, the long distance runners and the kindergarten kids in their reflective vests all joined in our fictive movement.

Making banners was a good way to start working with materials and as we sat on the floor together, sewing by hand and discussing our ideas, it felt almost like we were taking part in our own made-up story. But after a while the associations with political movements began to bother me. I do not mind our work having a political layer to it, but sometimes that tricks me into thinking I have to provide answers to the questions that Ewing and I are bringing up. We decided to let the banners rest for a while and instead of going further into activistic art expressions, we found ourselves increasingly interested in the mere existential dimensions of the forest theme; the human-nature relationship and how it manifests itself in our interactions with the forest, both for us personally and as a society.

At first, we were looking very closely at the trees. It is a quite natural starting point – when the UN organization FAO established a universal definition of the word forest it focused entirely on the size and placement of tree trunks; "Land spanning

Figure 18-19: Dunolin trees arranged first randomly and angled, then straight and in symmetric rows

more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds in situ." (FAO, 2018) Of course this way of defining the forest is reasonable in many ways, as the existence of trees is the very basis for many other life forms. But it is interesting to notice how it shapes our perception, and maybe this definition sometimes conceals the complex cluster of organisms that dwell among the trees.

During the spring 2022, Ewing and I explored the spatial experience of forests, mimicking natural versus plantation forest with strips of dunolin paper in the exhibition hall. (fig. 18-19). However this made us realize that we were both more interested in the vegetation on the ground; the intricate ecosystem of mosses, lichens, fungi and insects.

Shifting focus from the trees to smaller, other-than-human bodies, was both an artistic approach and an existential one, and it prompted me to look further into how I can relate to these forest individuals. I think one issue here is language, only by talking in terms of humans, animals, plants, microbes etcetera I get stuck in an invisible hierarchy with humanity on top of the pyramid. Here Haraway's way of playing with words and semiotics might be useful, she uses the expression "critters" in a democratic sense to refer to all sorts of living beings, sometimes even machines (Haraway, 2016). I think calling everyone critter can help to disrupt the hierarchy a little, maybe not to the extent that I see myself and a Knärot as equals, but at least it makes me look at this plant with a newfound respect.

However, without a deeper connection and an understanding of what binds us together, a word is just a word. In her book *Det omätbaras renässans* [The renaissance of the unmeasurable] Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark (b. 1973) introduces a way to bridge this gap between human life and all other living matter, by using Evan Thompsons model to describe three characteristics of the living. First, the living produces and creates itself through constant chemical synthesis, regulating its borders towards other matters. This means some sort of minimal identity. Secondly, the living navigates itself in its surroundings, not only in terms of what exists, but also in terms of what needs to be actualised. It has a desire. Thirdly, the living contain a movement and a form, thus creating a norm, a purpose for itself. Therefore, meaning is immanent in every living matter, not an additional dimension to the more developed human life (Bornemark, 2018).

Identity, purpose, desire. For me, these three words are very much associated with the existential struggle of being a human, but when I apply Thompson's model they cease to be exclusive for human experiences. I suddenly feel more connected to mushrooms, beetles and orchids; being a Puderspindling is having an identity, the Prydnadsbock has its own desire(s) and the Knärot for sure has a purpose – one of the more recent is saving the lives of many other critters, being one of the red-listed species that enables human forest activists to stop clearcutting by reporting its existence in certain areas (Röstlund, 2022, p. 93-94).

When trying to understand what mourning the forest critters means, I see a parallel between the loss of species and loss of culture. In her book *Att slå rot* [Need for roots] (1994) the French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) discusses the loss of the unknown. The history of warfare is shaped by the conquerors, and there are numerous examples of when a defeated culture has been completely wiped out. Without historical records, we can not mourn our loss of it because we do not know what we have been deprived of. But Weil encourages us to love what is silent, nameless and lost (Weil, 1994).

Similarly, evolutionary history is told through the human records of species, and I

believe that if we do not know about all of them, or rather, do not see what part they play in the ecosystem, they risk becoming collateral damage in the climate crisis.

I return to Haraway's prompt of making trouble and "stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places". (Haraway, 2016, p. 1) If rebellion was my starting point, it gradually transformed into mourning, both as a driving force and a format for our artistic work. But I think mourning is an even more potent response to our current reality, holding space for many (and sometimes conflicting) feelings at the same time; grief, sadness, anger, affection. It allows me and Ewing to stay with the trouble. With this approach to the loss of forest biodiversity our work can be both personal, philosophical and political at the same time, without presenting easy answers or jumping to quick solutions.

Figure 20-21: Tufting together and checking the result

Tufting

Time plan for tufting at KKV GBG – Konstnärernas Kollektivverkstad
(The Artists' Association of Collective Workshops in Gothenburg)

October 3 - October 16, 2022
Tuft period no 1

December 5 - December 18, 2022
Tuft period no 2

January 30 - February 19, 2023
Tuft period no 3

We are tufting together, Ewing and I. When I say together with Ewing, it usually means in a very literal sense. We are working on the same canvas to find an expression that represents the both of us; we are shifting positions and passing the material between us so many times that afterwards it is impossible to back-track all the steps (fig. 20-21).

In the tufting workshop, that also means being crowded. The tuft frame is almost as big as the room allows and there are electric cords and air tubes and threads everywhere. Moreover, to reach all over the canvas surface, one has to use ladders or a big mobile platform. One also has to find a good place to put the tuftgun's toolbox with extra wheels that are used for alternating the length of the fringe (which we do all the time). Even with the toolbox, the coffee mug and the water bottle in a good spot my limbs always threaten to tip things over, or get entangled in the yarns, cords and tubes. I cannot say there was never irritation between us – it is challenging and it requires being focused on one's own movements as well as being receptive to the other person's. But it is also fascinating entering into this call-and-response process and seeing what comes out. I find tufting extremely well suited for our collaboration, as the fringe easily blurs out tiny differences in pressure and density.

When we began our master studies, none of us had tried tufting before, although we talked about learning it for years. Early spring 2022 we had our first introduction to the technique at the tuft workshop of HDK-Valand in Gothenburg, and after that we put together a plan of three work periods the second school year; 2 weeks in October, 2 weeks in December and 3 weeks in February 2023. This very structured way of exploring the technique was mainly a consequence of us struggling to get workshop access in school, which we solved by using the workshop at KKV GBG (the Artists' Association of Collective Workshops in Gothenburg). But it turned out to be a great advantage in our process, giving our project a clear rhythm and direction forward. The overall focus for our tufting has been to embody the red-listed species through a visual and tactile experience, creating a sense of something that is growing with integrity, yet is vulnerable and exposed to violence.

Figure 23-24: Front and backside of intuitive tuft piece, work in progress

Figure 22: Color selection for tuft period

Tufting period no 1 & 2

October 3 - October 16, December 5 - December 18, 2022

With our background in screen printing, our instinct is often to come up with a design before entering the actual making, but for this first tufting period we wanted to challenge ourselves with a more intuitive approach than usual. Therefore we did not do any sketches beforehand, we only selected a color library together (fig. 22) and began working on two frames, switching positions with each other 1-2 times a day, without talking that much to begin with. Color and direction was guiding the composition.

Initially we just went for the colors we fancied but the more we tufted the more complex the color dynamic, which called for reflection and discussion. There were a lot of color combinations already on one of the canvases, did we need to balance that with some plain beige? The light, cold purple could contrast nicely with some bright red. But was it too much red in that piece already? Tufting intuitively served as a good sketching method, resulting in two tufted sculptures (fig. 23-24). But we realized that in order to refine our expression we needed to follow up with analysis, and maybe limit the color scheme a bit more for the next period.

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C: Sometimes these kinds of surfaces, I mean the ones I also find ugly, kind of get me going (laughing). I kind of like this, but it's also a combo that's sort of... beige-brownish.

H: So what do you like about it?

C: Maybe here I like that it looks kind of sick, that it's... it's a few threads here and there that have a little green in them, in the beige, which I like. It's like someone feeling sick. A pale and green face.

H: Yeah, I can agree with you there. And this is also one that's a little... over there are some darker threads, but it's something greenish here too, and that's kind of nice.

C: But that I think maybe bothers me a bit, with the white and the orange. I get this sort of salmon and shrimp-vibes from that.

H: But then you're talking about this part, not the one that...

C: Yes exactly, and I like it there, but then I don't like it in this combination. I like the green ones and so on, but I don't like the orange maybe, or the white in it.

221116

C: Alltså, ibland kan jag gå igång lite på, typ, ytor som jag tycker är lite fula (skrattar). Jag tycker typ att det här är lite gött, men det är ju liksom också en kombo som är lite... beigebrun.

H: Vad är det du gillar då?

C: Här kanske jag gillar att det ser lite sjukt ut på nåt sätt, att det drar... det är liksom några trådar här som drar lite åt grönt i det beiga, som jag gillar. Att det är liksom lite som att man mår illa. Blek och grön i ansiktet.

H: Det kan jag hålla med om. Alltså den här är ju också en sån lite... där är ju några andra mörkare trådar, men det finns nåt lite grönaktigt i det här också, som är nice liksom.

C: Men det tror jag kanske att jag stör mig lite på, med det vita och det orangea. Jag får lite såhär lax och räkvibbar av det här.

H: Men då pratar du om det här partiet, inte det som...

C: Ja precis, och det gillar jag där, men då gillar jag inte riktigt det i den kombon. Jag gillar dom gröna och så, men jag gillar inte så mycket det orangea kanske, eller det vita i den.

Figure 25: Close-up on finished piece, darker yarn sprinkled in red and beige areas

The main features from the first two tufts that we wanted to keep developing were making holes, trimming with caution and balancing bright and saturated colors with different forms of darker areas. With this in mind, we prepared sketches for the second work period, this time planning for three individual pieces designed to be hanging.

By working with darker areas, blending black threads with dark shades of blue, purple and brown, we intended to create a sense of decay, something dying. We also tried sprinkling bright colored surfaces with darker yarns, with the idea the decay was spreading, and discovered that it added some well needed complexity to the overall color balance. Both Ewing and I have a fondness for bright colors, but here we rediscovered the complementing effects of the opposite (fig. 25).

We also incorporated a lot of holes in our tufts this time, leaving empty spaces here and there, and once the canvas had been taken down from the frame, ripping them open (fig. 26). This added a layer of uncertainty to the process, as the canvas became weaker where the holes were placed. When hanging the tufts in meat hooks, they collapsed a bit more than expected and we were slightly frustrated at first. But after the initial disappointment we realized we liked this effect, as it also enhanced the impression of vulnerability.

To give our sculptures some agency of their own, we were very cautious to not trim them too much afterwards. In the tufting process long excessive threads tend to shoot out randomly and it is common to cut them off for a neat finish. In these pieces we chose to keep most of them instead and use the fact that they bring an uncontrolled layer to the expression (fig. 27).

Figure 26: Holes in canvas, backside of tuft
Figure 27: Close-up on hairy fringe

Tufting period no 3

January 30 - February 19, 2023

When entering the third and last tufting period, we had an even more clear idea beforehand of what we wanted to achieve. We were going to make one large piece, intended to be the main character in the scene of a vigil; playing the part of someone either dying or already passed away. The color scheme was inspired by our previous tufts but faded and almost sickly with many different beige nuances. Our intention with the beige was to balance the other colors, similarly to the dark areas in the other sculptures, but this time to give a bleak impression instead of a dramatic one. We planned a lot of smaller holes, like it was being eaten by something or withering away, and prepared a few incisions to be sewn together but not stuffed, so that the tuft would appear a little collapsed.

Expressing death or sickness through material and tactility was also an important part in making this piece. Overall we wanted more roughness, playing with the sensation of dry, crumbling vegetation. Apart from various coarse wool yarns we introduced jute, which is a rough bast fiber. We also had the intention of incorporating some paper yarn afterwards to further enhance the sense of decay. However, we had to let go of the paper idea due to time limits.

Figure 28: Sketch for tuft period no 3

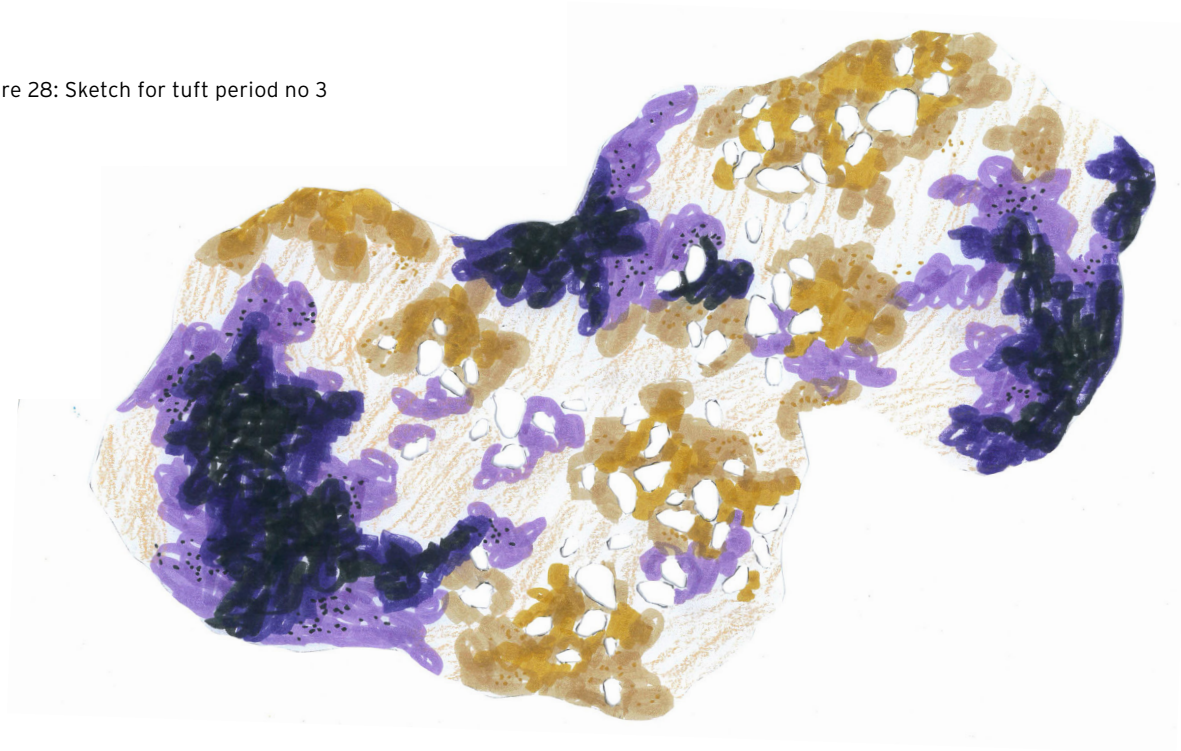

Figure 29: Close-up in fringe gradients
Figure 30: A selection of the different yarn bundles used

In the making of this final piece, we managed to merge intuition with a planned layout in a way that really sparked our creativity. Using a moderately detailed sketch (fig. 28), drawing the outlines of each color field on the canvas and having a selected color library to work with, provided the necessary framework. But within that we allowed each other to be very free. The main colors beige, dark purple and yellow could be interpreted in many different ways, and the transition between one color and another could be more or less distinguished.

With a much more extensive yarn selection than before; for each main color there were many similar nuances and various qualities, the alterations became more subtle and refined (fig. 29). We could make smooth gradients to bridge contrasting colors such as purple and ocre, or twist a large field of beige into greenish, pinkish, or grayish – the overall impression still being beige. Consequently, despite its many variations (fig. 30), I think the overall expression of this tuft remained rather calm and cohesive.

Figure 31: Frontside of tuft frame, work in progress tuft period 3

The room and the ceremony

In this section I will talk about how we try to contextualize the tufted sculptures, by creating a spatial setting for them with a certain atmosphere. Working spatially is an important part of our practice, as we both like experiencing art with our whole bodies and we want to invite the audience to physically immerse in our worlds. But besides an investigation of space we also wanted to look into the ceremonial aspects of mourning, as we felt that the room and the ceremony are very much connected when it comes to death and grieving.

Creating a space for people to mourn the forest together also means giving some direction for how to interact within it, and I will move a bit back and forth between these layers in the text; ceremony, interaction and physical setting, trying to see how they belong together.

A space for mourning

To better understand what an act of mourning could look like we started reading Hagberg's descriptions of folkloristic practices, but we also looked into our own religious references. Both Ewing and I have grown up with christian traditions, but seeing as Sweden is a very secular country, those experiences have had very little spiritual meaning for Ewing. I, on the other hand, was raised in a family of believers and after leaving the church for a couple of years in my early twenties, I decided to come back again. I have always regarded my spiritual self as something separate from my creative path, and despite being very interested in existential topics, missing the potential of my christian upbringing in terms of references, rituals and human practices. But now I suddenly saw it as an asset.

Swedish musician Sara Parkman (b. 1989) makes electronic pop music with strong influences from folk music and her own christian background. Her album *Vesper* (evening prayer) is inspired by the liturgy of the mass, which she describes as an emotional journey. Parkman says that the church provides a space where people can be together in a state of sadness for a moment, without having to explain or elaborate on their own personal wounds (Häll, 2019).

Parkman's formulation resonated with both Ewing and me, and we decided that we wanted to create a similar space for mourning the loss of biodiversity with other people. By taking inspiration from the church but mixing it up with other things, we began searching for an expression that could stretch beyond the borders of religion.

Figure 32-35: The sawdust ritual, stills from video recording

Figure 36-37: The altar workshop

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Felt connected without speaking to each other. At first it was a bit nervous, but eventually we established some sort of shared focus, a sense of being present – together and alone at the same time.

The sawdust ritual (fig. 32-35) was an attempt to use our own bodies to physically, even intimately grieve the forest. We emptied two large bags of sawdust on the floor, put on masks and instrumental music and moved our bodies in interaction with the pulverized wood. During the fall of 2022 we performed this ritual twice, in solitude just the two of us, and recorded it. The notebook passage in the beginning of this section is written after the first session. Creating our own ceremony and sharing it with each other was almost like a cleansing experience, and it made us increasingly interested in further exploring both rituals of mourning and the physical settings for it. Initially we talked about inviting other people to partake in the sawdust ritual together with us, or develop it into a performance. But we did not see a clear connection to our tufting process, and eventually put our ideas aside for future projects.

We followed this up with The altar workshop (fig. 36-37), where we focused more on the room itself; how to create a space of stillness and serenity. With the idea that

symbolism can open up for new existential dimensions, we started playing around with religious references, but we soon realized it can equally exclude and make people feel alienated. Placing things in different heights, however, to make them either elevated or more available was a method we decided to continue to work with.

We also began to investigate how light influences the atmosphere of a room, taking advantage of the natural light from the windows. Having the objects centered in front of one of them added a certain vibe to the setting that I really liked, it felt dramatic in a way that I associate with something being sacred, rather than something being staged.

Figure 38: First sketch for the vigil

Figure 40: Card board urns

Figure 39: First sketch of *Wounded ground*

Three stages of death

Both the sawdust ritual and the altar workshop took place before we had tufted anything, but in November 2022 after finishing the first tuft period, we started working with *Three stages of death*. It was our first attempt to merge the tufted pieces with the rest of our ideas into one cohesive installation. We approached the spatial composition as three scenes that dealt with death from three different angles: 1. as a farewell – *Vigil*, 2. as an act of violence – *Wounded ground*, 3. as a chain in a production – *Remains*.

In *Vigil*, a tufted sculpture was placed on the floor, accompanied by drainpipes mimicking candles and surrounded by thin white fabrics hanging from the ceiling (fig 38). This was inspired by Hagberg's descriptions of the death chamber; the folkloristic custom to decorate a room for a dead family member, where the body was placed to receive its last farewell before the funeral. When preparing the death chamber it was common to use white fabrics to cover the walls of the room (Hagberg, 1937).

In *Wounded ground* we experimented with hanging a group of tufts in large meat hooks, playing with associations of slaughter, flesh and uprooted ground (fig. 39). The store-bought shiny hooks provided a sterile contrast to the tufted surface that we found quite effective. We really liked the butcher reference, as it added a lot of violence to the scene but we also wanted to give it a touch of something unexpected. After trying polyester cords, metal wire and metal chains to hang the hooks with, we decided to make our own chains by using transparent cable ties. I think this little addition of playfulness was well needed. The choice of material also balanced the expression, being a strong visual element yet not too dominating colorwise, neither reflecting light like metal would have.

The third scene, *Remains*, was at this early stage very vague to us. We had several parallel tracks, all of them based on the idea of using sawdust as a representation of butchered trees. During this first workshop we made rough sketches of urns out of cardboard (fig. 40), thinking the urn could be an interesting archetype to translate into another material later, either to contain sawdust or to make the actual urns out of sawdust somehow.

Our conclusion after the first week of sketching on *Three stages of death* was that the different approaches to the death really captured the ambiguity we felt towards the red-listed species' situation. *Vigil* was a way to humanize them and create a sense of dignity around their departure. *Wounded ground* dealt with our anger towards greedy forest companies, and our own sense of guilt for being part of that human exploit, as consumers. *Remains* was still unclear, but it raised questions of what happens after the passing and it felt intuitively important as well for us.

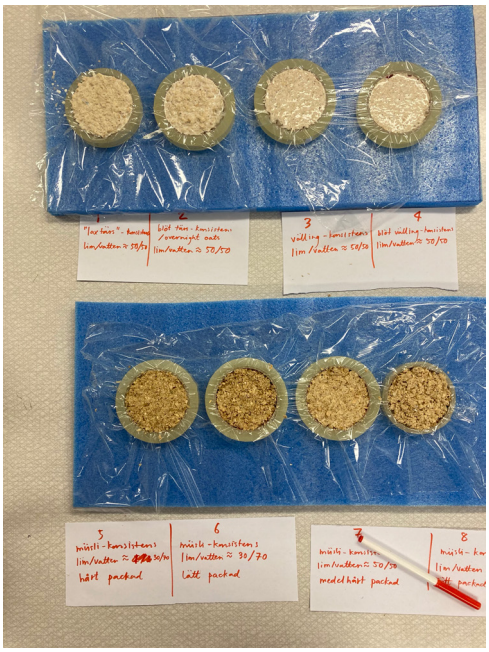

Figure 41-42: Different mixtures of sawdust and wood glue

Development of spatial components

In parallel to tufting more sculptures, we continued to work with our installation concept, aiming for the stages of death to be either parts of the same big, cohesive setting or exhibited as separate scenes. To understand better which elements were necessary to contextualize the tufts, and what to take away, we began developing our spatial sketches into more concrete materials and objects.

In both Vigil and Wounded ground the tufted pieces were the main characters, but for Remains we did not have a leading part, just a strong instinct to work with sawdust in one way or another. We were kind of stuck in this idea for quite some time, but I think the tactility of sawdust as a material, its symbolic potential and our own intimate experience of dancing with it, made it hard to let go of the conviction that it was a keyplayer in our body of work.

We began looking at different options for making a moldable material combining sawdust with other ingredients, for instance wood glue (fig. 41-42). This was neither practical nor visually satisfying; it took almost a week for the mixture to set in a mold and the moisture released particles of iron and other substances, causing the sawdust to change color to a rather sad grayish brown. In the process of finding other solutions we realized that the main appeal of the sawdust was in its original form – dry, fluffy and kind of helpless in its inability to stay in one place without the borders of a container.

Apart from practical issues, the sawdust's potent connection to the forest industry started to itch as well. Was it not a bit too easy just to point fingers at someone else? We wanted to bring in our own sense of guilt, not detach ourselves from it, and further examining that feeling led us to start playing with our own waste material instead: the leftover cut-off yarns from the tufting (fig. 43-46).
Mixing the cut-offs with tuft glue, which preserves color very well and can be blended with water to make the formula more or less sturdy, we created our own composite material and coated paper cylinders with it. As an abstract form with an abstract purpose, I believe the cylinders hold a lot of potential to spark curiosity, while being physically and symbolically linked to our tufted sculptures in a way that the sawdust could not achieve. I also associate them with pellets, and in that way they also refer to wood production.

Figure 43-45: Making composite yarn material and coating paper cylinders
Figure 46: Close-up on two finished pellets

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H: What I thought about was, in We Were Here, when everyone was supposed to take their shoes off, and how that became a thing... but I started to feel now, I mean it's super common in many cultures to take off your shoes to pay respect. You take off your shoes in many temples, in... I think you do it in the Mosque too?

C. Yeah and wash your hands.

H: Wash your hands... eh, the Jews has this extensive washing rituals, you take off your shoes while entering Japanese homes, I mean there's a lot about taking off your shoes that is symbolic. And maybe, I mean American culture is very far to the other side when you can basically lie down in someone's bed with your shoes on.

C: But that's also kind of a power thing, when I worked at the kindergarten and didn't have any slippers and just walked around in my socks, and then comes all the parents and I'm like: hello...

H: Yes exactly! Yeah, and so I just started to feel like hmm, maybe we should invite people to take off their shoes on Wednesday...

C: But I think, I mean we can do that, but I also think it depends a little on the context. So, let's say we get to do something at Konsthall C – great place to take off your shoes, that's gonna be exciting, more like a ritual of sorts. At Southern Swedish Design Days – nah. And here - no. But as long as we get to have, I mean, an exhibition of our own and take care of the whole...

H: Yeah, that's kind of a basis.

C: ... and then... now I'm just making things up, but in the Box venue, let's say that this would be in the first room and then people would walk up the small stairs – of course you would have to take off your shoes to enter that little room...

H: It's almost as if we're doing something wrong if we're not asking people to do it, because then we're not preparing them on what mindset they should enter with.

C: But also, I only repeat what we said before, about seating height and so on...

H: (laughing) talking to the cam!

C: ... now it's like normal stools, and it's like a regular seating height... I don't think we have to think about accessibility and stuff, that everyone should be able...

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H: Det jag tänkte på är att i We were here, när alla skulle ta av sig skorna, och att det blev sån grej... men jag började känna typ nu, att det är jättevanligt i många kulturer att man ska ta av sig skorna för att visa vördnad typ. Man tar av sig skorna i många olika typer av tempel, i såhär... jag har för mig att man gör det i mosken också?

C: Ja men och tvättar händerna.

H: Tvättar händerna, eh, judarna har ju liksom långa tvättningsritualer, man tar av sig skorna när man går in i japanska hem, alltså såhär det finns väldigt mycket i att ta av sig skorna som är en symbolgest. Och kanske såhär, amerikansk kultur är väldigt långt ifrån det hållet när man typ kan ligga i nåns säng med skorna på.

C. Men där är ju också en maktgrej, tycker jag, när man jobbade på förskolan och inte hade innetofflor som vuxen och gick runt i strumporna, och så kommer alla föräldrar och man bara "hejhej".

H: Ja, verkligen! Ja men så jag började bara känna hmm, vi kanske ska bjuda in folk till att ta av sig skorna på onsdag...

C: Men jag tycker, ja det kan vi göra, men jag tycker också det beror lite på vilket sammanhang. Låt säga att vi får göra nånting på Konsthall C – jättebra att ta av sig skorna, liksom spännande, att det blir mer en ritual eller liksom den grejen typ. På Southern Swedish Design Days – nä. Och här – nej. Men så länge vi skulle kunna ha en liksom, egen utställning och ta hand om liksom hela...

H: Ja, det kräver ju det.

C: ... då... bara nu hittar jag på, i Box lokaler till exempel, låt säga att det här skulle vara i förrummet och sen så skulle man gå in upp för den här lilla trappan – det klart man skulle ta av sig skorna för att få gå in i det lilla rummet...

H: Det är nästan som att man gör fel om man inte ber folk göra det, för då är det som att man inte förbereder dem på vilket mentalt tillstånd dom ska kliva in i.

C: Men också bara upprepar det vi sa innan, med sitthöjd och så vidare...

H: (skrattar) talking to the cam!

C: ... nu är det som vanliga pallar, och det är liksom en normal sitthöjd – jag tycker liksom inte heller att man måste tänka att det typ ska vara tillgänglighetsanpassat, för

H: I mean, let's face it, some people wouldn't be able to sit on a chair either, so...

C: No, and it's like this... and you still have the choice whether you want to do it or not. But right now it's like, as you said, inviting... there's no barrier, so it's very easy to leave as well if you don't... you don't feel like you're entering something.

H: I think it's about creating reverence for what's lying here. And reverence requires that you give up on something, or offer your time for something. And if we don't ask people to do any of those things, then it's not like we're asking them... I mean, then we're not presenting this as something separate and... I would use the word sacred, it doesn't have to be a god or something, it can just be like "what the fuck, there's a dead body here". Then you behave in a certain way. I mean, somehow that's the tone we're trying to set here.

C: Ah, but I think reverence was a good word, or respect, or that...

H: Ah, but I like reverence, because respect can also be a little shallow sometimes, it's like "show respect to each other" "our values"... school

C: But if we think like this: dignity and lack of dignity? Is there something there, it should feel dignified I mean? But like this, what we discovered yesterday, maybe it was the relationship, I mean, between seating and [podium] and, like this, here it felt good, but maybe we should just lower everything...

H: Lower the body and the podium.

C: ... yes, because now we can say that no matter what kind of podium we chose, this is super clumsy. It feels like, it's really taking over. But then I think there's something about this angular meeting the organic, it's like, it's custommade but there's still this kind of friction.

H: But in that case I would like to simplify the angles...

C: I'm all up for that.

H: ... to find, because if we can make a form that fits this form, but with as few angles as possible? And I think that if we also lower it, then it allows more of these empty spaces, without them feeling like some sort of limitation.

att alla ska kunna...

H: Alltså, let's face it, vissa kommer inte ens kunna sitta på en stol, så att...

C: Nämen liksom att det är såhär.. och man har ju ändå det valet om man vill göra det eller inte. Men just nu blir det väldigt, som du sa, man bjuds... det är ingen barriär, så då blir det också väldigt lätt att lämna om man heller inte.. man känner inte att man går in i något

H: Jag tänker att det handlar om att skapa vördnad, för det som ligger här. Och vördnad kräver ju att man gör, att man gör avkall på nånting, eller man avsätter tid för nånting. Och om vi inte ber nån göra nån av dom delarna, då är det inte heller som att vi ber dom... alltså då är det heller inte riktigt som att vi presenterar det här som liksom nåt avskilt och... alltså jag skulle använda ordet heligt liksom, det behöver ju inte vara en gudom för det, det kan bara vara såhär "vad fan det ligger en död kropp här liksom". Då hanterar man det på ett speciellt sätt. Nånstans är det ju ändå den känslan vi spelar på.

C: Ah, men vördnad tyckte jag var ett bra ord, eller respekt, eller liksom att...
H: Ah men jag gillar vördnad, för respekt kan ibland va lite såhär urvattnat också, det är såhär "visa respekt mot varandra" "värdegrund"... skolan

C: Men om man tänker så då: vördnadsfullt och ovärdigt? Finns det nåt där, att det ska kännas värdigt liksom. Men typ jättemycket, det jag tycker vi hittade igår, det kanske var relationen mellan typ såhär sitthöjden och den [podiet] att såhär, här kändes det bra, men att vi kanske bara ska sänka allt...

H: Sänka kroppen och podiet.

C: ... ja, för just nu konstaterar vi oavsett vad vi väljer för typ av podie, så är det ju jätteklumpigt. Det känns liksom, det tar över jättemycket. Sen kan jag också tycka att det finns nånting i det här kantiga som möter det organiska, att det är lite såhär, det är anpassat men det finns den här liksom bråkigheten.

H: Men då skulle jag vilja förenkla det kantiga...

C: Det är jag helt med på.

H: ... för att hitta, för kan vi göra en form som passar den här formen, men med så få hörn som möjligt? Och tror jag att om vi dessutom sänker den, då kan få bli lite fler såna döytor utan att dom känns som en begränsning.

Figure 47: Trying out different heights of podium with card board mock-ups

To develop the scene of the vigil, we started experimenting with placing the tufted piece on some sort of podium, playing with associations of a deathbed or an open coffin. With the concept of humanizing in our minds, having the tuft directly on the floor was not dignified enough. First we focused on the height, trying to elevate the sculpture and make it available at the same time. The initial idea was to have stools or a bench next to the tuft (fig. 47), but after trying that out and talking about it we realized that it did not promote the kind of stillness and reflection we were looking for. It was easy to sit down, but equally easy to stand up and leave again.

But the relation between the seating height and the podium height was good; close enough to see details in the fringe and far enough to get an overview. Lowering the podium a bit and instead inviting the mourning audience to kneel or sit down on cushions became a way to achieve this balance of sacred intimacy. It was still the same view distance but a slightly demanding way of sitting, which made it into a more conscious choice to stay by the tuft for a while. However, as the final exam drew near, we did not have the time to make the cushions we so carefully planned for. For me, this was quite a disappointment. Without them we lost an important part of the visual direction, guiding people on how to act in our vigil, and I would very much like to add this element when we continue this project after our masters.

We decided to momentarily drop the idea of framing the vigil with draped fabrics, and create a separate space for it by using spotlights instead. But the choice of mate-

rial to place the tuft on felt vital – a contrasting surface that enhanced the softness of the yarn, but still provided warmth and a sense of caring for the vulnerable textile body. To achieve this we started working on a wooden coffin, custommade according to the shape of the tuft (fig. 48) and painted dark purple, with an upholstered top in shiny viscose satin (fig. 49). The satin had something grand and luxurious about it that made us think about bridal gowns, it felt dignified and visually appealing at the same time.

The choice of purple for the wooden base came quite naturally for us – we wanted something that could be associated with human coffins, but also that matched the color scheme of the tufted sculpture. After discussing a white surface treatment of the wood or just keeping it natural we came to the conclusion that a light color felt too happy and hopeful. With dark purple the podium resembles coffins in black or dark wood, while still having its own expression, which similarly to the cable tie chains added a subtle touch of playfulness. As a final touch, we also designed two candleholders to be placed next to the tuft. The base was made in wood and painted with the same color as the podium, and for candles we used two yellow drain pipes that I had found on the ground during a walk in the forest.

Figure 48: Designing the shape of the podium
Figure 49: Combining viscose satin and tuft fringe

Building weeks

230320 - 230331

We are in Utställningshallen. Simon is explaining why it would be easier to build an inner structure first, before attaching the plywood sides. It sounds clever. We need to get material asap. 45 x 45 mm spruce construction timber. And wooden profiles for decoration, to play with the concept of a coffin.

None of us understands angles at first. Or I think I do, then get annoyed with Charlotte for not following my messy explanation. 45 degrees plus 90 is 135 degrees, right? But the ruler on the dim saw only says 0 to 90... Argh.

There are so many steps. Cut the 45 mm timber in the dim saw, drill holes, no wait, make a jig first, then drill.

Glue, screw, wait.
Glue, screw, wait.
Apple. Coffee.
Ask Simon for help. Again.

The top board does not fit the inner structure. Both of us are pushing it from different directions, trying to adjust. Frustration. A testy remark.

And here comes the angles again. Nothing in this building project is hundred percent straight, every single measurement is derailing and I am out. We keep saying it is only set design, it is a prop, but we are still perfectionists although barely passable wood workers and it is the end of a very long degree project.

Charlotte says every evening that at least we are having fun, or she is. I pretend to agree to keep the spirits up.

Plyboard sides are glued and screwed and set. Most of them align decently.
We begin to argue about the candle holders... pause. Bathroom, breathe. Both of us reset and listen. Agreeing on the rough dimensions.

The pine profiles are my last push.
Nine hours.
Sanding, fitting, sanding,
sanding,
fitting,
sanding,
clamp, next.

Glue, clamp, adjust, clamp, adjust, Charlotte is scribbling down the time.
Next. And repeat.

I have very blurry memories of the last weeks when we were building, painting and upholstering the podium. We were both very tired already when we started working with it in late March 2023, but absolutely convinced that this last object was crucial to our installation and we would not present our body of work without it.

When I am in the process of making something I can be frustrated with the scale of our ambition, our perfectionist standards and in the case of woodworking; our limited experience. But I never question why we do it, or why we do it ourselves instead of paying someone to do it for us. I am driven by some sort of feverish determination to materialize our concept in order to find answers to what is working or not, and I think making everything ourselves make me feel like I am capable, I can make things happen with my own hands. There is something deeply satisfying with that. That being said, none of us would ever take on building a 1700 x 2800 x 250 millimeters podium with quirky angles and delicate wooden profiles as an individual project. But being two somehow multiplies both our confidence and stubbornness, and it is one of the best things about collaborating.

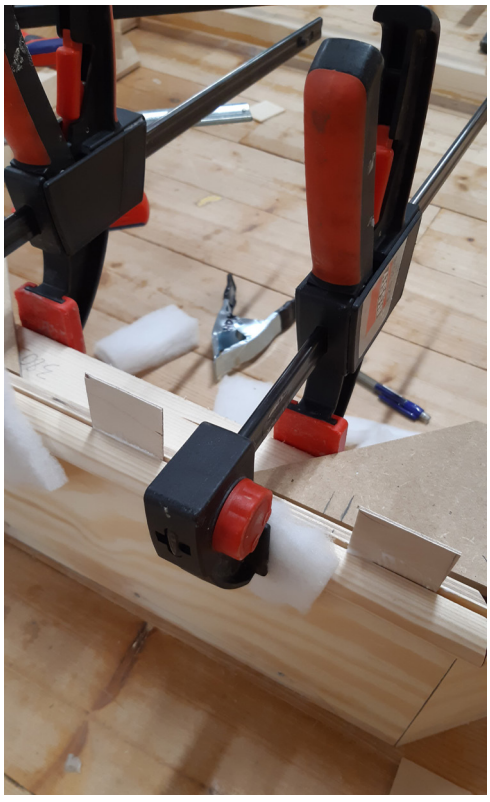
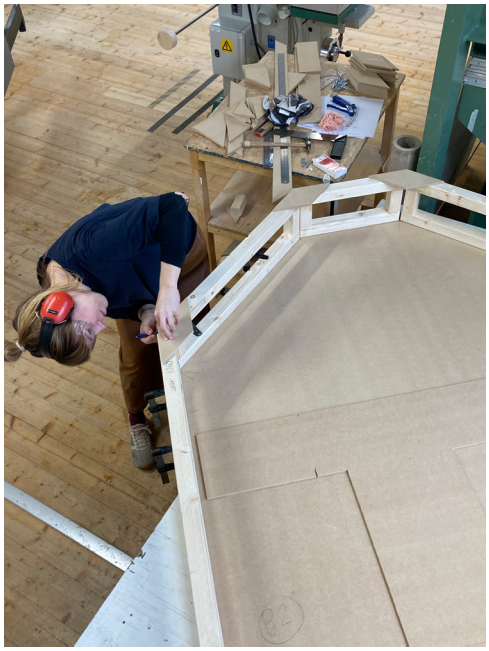


Figure 50-52: Glueing using clamps and spike gun (having fun?)

Figure 53-55: Plywood and wooden profiles attached, Ewing writing the glueing time, paint drying



Sound and light

Going back to the ceremonial aspects of our installation, we started talking at an early stage about using sound to frame and define a certain space. Besides being keen on playing with sound in general, we were also influenced by Sara Parkman's way to use christian references in her music and visual identity, and we looked at the church for inspiration on collective acts of mourning.

We decided to initiate a collaboration with Love Bylund (b. 1995), a musician and composer based in Gothenburg. At this time we were not sure about how our work should interact with the sound, so we only gave Bylund an overview of our current process, and asked him to interpret it and compose a piece of his own choice. Bylund translated our theme into a forest requiem and reconstructed the sequence Lacrimosa, which is a part of the classic requiem structure. By composing two sound loops of different duration he created a seemingly repetitive but still organic piece, to be played using two synthesizers and two cassette players.

To have a first test with an audience we set up a room with the scenes of *Vigil, Wounded ground* and *Remains*, and invited our fellow students to walk around in the installation while we played a demo of Bylund's requiem. The response was a complete disappointment – the music was described as overly sad, taking over the physical work, telling people what to feel, or just being too repetitive.

I felt stupid.

After recovering a bit, we came to the conclusion that Bylund's own idea of a setup, having the synthesizers and cassette players as visual elements in the room and sound coming from different directions, was still worth trying out. But perhaps framing the sound as more of an additional performance to our own piece and playing it during a certain time, could change the overall impression. We decided to try it out during our exam exhibition in April 2023.

In addition to sound we also started experimenting with light, as a tool for directing the atmosphere. Although natural light is hard to compete with when bringing out vibrant colors, we found that using spotlights from above on the hanging sculptures really enhanced the dramatic setting, and created an interesting shadow play. But I felt strongly that the tuft in the vigil benefited from a softer lightning, coming more from the side, and maybe this was my first realization that the three different scenes might need to be exhibited more separately than I first imagined.

Figure 56-64: The final documention of *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever*

III Discussion

Humanizing, organized guilt and universal responsibility

How can textile art make death more tangible to humans?

Painting with yarn

A shared headspace

Figure 65: A tangle of threads and cords in the tuft workshop

In the first section of this chapter, *Humanizing, organized guilt and universal responsibility*, I focus on the theoretical framework for our project, by discussing how humanizing has served as a method and what it brings to the final installation. I also bring in the German philosopher Hannah Arendt, to better understand my own guilt and my role as a human being in the situation of the dying forest species. In the second part, *How can textile art make death more tangible to humans?* I make a parallel between our making process and acts of mourning, and reflect on how that mourning could be transmitted to other people in an exhibition context. *Painting with yarn* puts our tufted expression in dialogue with a few other practitioners working with the same technique. The last part, *A shared headspace,* is a reflection on how my own perception of our collaboration has changed during this exam project, putting both our relationship and the way we work together in connection with other textile artist duos.

Humanizing, organized guilt & universal responsibility

Looking back at our process – both the development of our physical body of work and the emotional and philosophical driving forces – the concept of humanizing has to be problematized. It served as a starting point for understanding, and it led us to create a vigil for the red-listed species, with the tufted piece as a representation of the silent, lost (and to the great majority of humans, also nameless) myriads of forest individuals. And to emphasize that perspective we also contrasted with conflicting ones; tufts being hanged like flayed animals, and yarn "vegetation" being chopped, chewed and compressed to anonymous composite material.

In this case humanizing helped us to provide multiple entrances to our work; the farewell scene together with the slaughter- and the production references mirrors the ambivalence in the human-nature relationship; a mix of romanticizing, neglect and exploitation. But if we allow ourselves to just settle there, is it enough to disrupt the hierarchy that separates critters from critters?

The method we use for inclusion also reflects our own human values, and perhaps limits our thinking without us always noticing so. Haraway demonstrates this when discussing how pigeons have impressed humans with different abilities, amongst others their capacity to recognize themselves in a mirror. She remarks that this skill in particular carries great weight in Western-influenced psychology and philosophy, due to the emphasis on individualism (Haraway, 2016).

Relating this back to our vigil, us making an installation and a ceremony for mosses and lichens is deeply rooted in a human attitude to death and decay, and the subjects of our farewells may care very little about our efforts. But similarly to a funeral for a human being, the ritual addresses the mourning relatives as much as the one who passed away. It provides some sort of closure for me and Ewing, and hopefully a format to grieve together with other people.

According to Haraway, mourning is also part of how we (as in all critters) get on together, creating space for multispecies recuperation. There are many losses in biodiversity already, and more is yet to come. Part of staying with the trouble is also to become-with the dead and the extinct (Haraway, 2016, p. 101). *Becoming-with* is another one of Haraways word plays, and as I understand it a way to describe how different species are rendered capable by interaction with each other.

But in order for me to become-with the forest species I must also acknowledge the fact that I am, as a human, part of their extinction, and it is hard to piece this together in my head. I still struggle with the guilt I feel, which is a big part of my own grief. When I try to take responsibility for my own environmental impact I only find two positions,

either succumbing to despair over how little influence I have, or taking comfort in that at least I am a conscious person. And both of these seem like dead ends to me.

I find the German philosopher Hannah Arendt's (1906-1975) essay *Organized guilt and universal responsibility* helpful to navigate in this inner conflict of mine. It departs from a completely different context, but it resonates with the difficulties I have of defining responsibility and guilt in a society built on viewing nature mainly as a bunch of resources. Arendt's text centers around the holocaust, describing the political and social mechanics leading up to a whole people becoming accomplices in a systematic murder machine, a process that made a lot of people guilty without really being responsible and vice versa. Their guilt was organized; the system was designed to make everyone culpable (Arendt, 1994).

When Arendt analyzes how this could happen in Germany, she dismisses notions about people being good or bad, or that education prevents us from doing terrible things. Instead she points towards a major shift in social values combined with poverty and desperation. The pressure of the chaotic economy preceding the war had transformed the average German family man, from a responsible member of society to someone primarily concerned about the wellbeing of himself and his family. Being exposed to unemployment and uncertainty of the future, he was prepared to do anything to secure his own situation (Arendt, 1994).

While the loss of biodiversity is more a consequence of human behavior, than a conscious act of extinction, I think the environmental guilt is organized in a similar way. Very few people can honestly say that they do not know what is going on, that the human impact on the environment is a completely new idea to them. But we are too concerned about our own well-being, and our imagination too limited by the fact that our whole society is based on capitalizing natural resources.

But how do we deal with the guilt? According to Arendt, the only way to avoid hypocrisy is to accept universal responsibility, for "[the idea of humanity] has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men" (Arendt, 1994, p. 131). To make a parallel to our project, it would be a dead end to put ourselves on the outside of the forest situation, content in criticizing the exploit of the Swedish industry or lack of political strategies. Pretending to be a moral exception is not the way out.

This is why the yarn pellets are such key components to me. At first glance they seem like an attempt to reduce waste by making use of our own production left-overs. But when drenched in kilos of synthetic tuft glue and transformed into an anonymous and perhaps useless object, they make a bend in their sustainable aspirations and throw the question back at us – is this the best we can do? In this way, I think our pellets pull us back into the organized guilt again, help us to accept universal responsibility and critically review our own species without putting ourselves on a pedestal.

How can textile art make death more tangible to humans?

This question has both an internal and an external dimension to it, it is about how Ewing and I channel our emotions through the process of making and how we use the crafted objects and our spatial setting to communicate with an audience. I will start with my own experience of mourning and making, and then move on to our work's correspondence with other people, in the context of our two graduation shows.

I believe the loss of biodiversity is quite hard to grasp for humans like myself, living most of our lives in an urban environment. After spending two years on this project, reading facts and figures, walking in forests of monoculture and forests of complexity, the death of species is still somewhat abstract to me. Giving form is to visualize something and make it tangible, and it has become very clear to me that I am doing it as much for myself as for other people.

The making process enabled me to channel my sorrow, frustration and anger through a physical material, and I think the directness of the tufting technique was particularly well suited in that regard. The whole body gets activated. I climb up and down the ladder, changing threads and feeding wheels. I press the tuft gun against the canvas and the feedback of my actions is instant. I can immediately evaluate if the result matches my intentions. There is something deeply satisfying about a craft so concrete, it makes my grieving hands feel useful. As our sketches allowed a lot of small variations, I could also sync the choice of yarns with my daily mood. In this way, the act of making embodies the subheading of our exam work – tufting is truly an act of mourning through textile craft.

A perhaps more unexpected tool for mourning, at least for me, was the various spatial settings Ewing and I created during our process, and the conversations they resulted in. Besides talking while working with them, discussing intentions and solving practical problems, we often took some time just to walk, sit or lie down in the room and those particular moments we ended up having really interesting talks. The recorded dialogues in this report all come from such a moment. It was as if the spatial compositions functioned as a set design for our emotional and existential processes – materializing our questions and putting new ones in our heads.

Apart from stimulating our ongoing dialogue, I feel that the installation medium provided a useful format to bring all the layers of our project together. I think this relates back to the core of our practice being both material-based and conceptual. If we were driven only by the ideas behind our work, perhaps we would have chosen to manifest them through a piece of the actual forest, in a similar spirit as the Norwegian artist Jone Kvie (b. 1971). His contribution to Documenta fifteen, *Here Here VI* (2022),

Figure 66: *Here, Here VI*, by Jone Kvie

is a massive rock covered by lichens and taken directly from a local quarry in the outskirts of Kassel. During the biennale it was placed inside Kassel train station, inviting people to pause and touch or rest upon it. As lichens are not plants but composite, a collaboration of algae, cyanobacteria and fungi, they embody the collective spirit that characterized Documenta fifteen, and open up for a world beyond human perception (Høgsberg, 2022).

While Kvie found the rock self-sufficient to express his ideas, I find myself at the opposite end. I do want to engage with a material, and it is not only about the making itself, it is also about making things up. To speculate, to invent, to make-believe. In *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* Ewing and I are playing with facts and fiction, not to seduce anyone, but to reimagine and create space for reflection. This is made possible by us making objects and settings, in which we refer to multiple realities in an abstracted, collage-like manner.

When making an installation with this kind of approach, I think our textile translation of the dying species sometimes communicates more strongly than reality itself. Not when it comes to the beauty and wonders of nature, here I firmly believe that the forest speaks best about its own values. But when our art voices the threats against it and humanity's role in its destruction, it prompts people to look further and ask what future the forest is facing.

Figure 67: The vigil together with Bylund's sound installation
Figure 68: The other setting with hangings tufts and pellets

Exhibition – MA:XI

Giving form to the dying forest species was not only about making their situation more real and relatable for ourselves, Ewing and I also wanted our work to resonate with other people and here our two graduation shows provided a valuable context. The first one, called *MA:XI*, took place in Steneby Konsthall, an exhibition hall located in Dals Långed that focuses on material-based art and design (Steneby, n.d.). We presented *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* together with the exam works of our fellow master students and the exhibition was up for a week at the end of April 2023.

Since it was a group show, compromises had to be made and we chose to arrange our objects in two separate compositions. The podium and the two candle holders were placed in a corner of the room, creating a calm space for the vigil (fig 67). In the other end of the exhibition hall, near the entrance, we made a setting with the three hanging tufts, two tufts on the floor and the pellets standing in groups around them (fig 68).

I think it was a good move to present our body of work as two different scenes. The tufts hanging in meat hooks create quite a dramatic atmosphere, whereas the vigil speaks of stillness and dignity. During our final exams one week earlier, we had for practical reasons placed everything on the same side of the room, and I got the impression that it confused people a little. It can be powerful to put contrasting expressions next to each other, but in this case I think it mainly becomes a conflict and harder to read for others.

As the venue is situated in a small village, we did not have so many visitors who were not already familiar with our project – most of them were friends, family, students and teachers. However, when guarding the exhibition one day I had an interaction with two people I did not know before, that made me think there could be a unifying aspect of work to explore further.

They seemed very engaged in the future of the forest, and as we started talking about our project, I noticed that one of them was a bit moved by it, even close to tears. I am not sure that was entirely because of our sculptures, but rather the reaction of a person that already cared very deeply for the critters we were portraying. We shared a moment together, and as they left I felt that this meeting had added something to our work; a potential to process and connect with other people.

But for someone who does not have the same pre-knowledge as these visitors, what other entrances to grieving together can our art provide? During the exhibition we also invited Bylund to install his sound piece, as part of the vigil scene. The main setup involved two speakers hidden inside the coffin, but with consideration to the other

exhibitors we ended up using headphones for most of the time. I was skeptical at first, as headphones sometimes become a barrier, but watching people listening in them I realized they could also function as an invitation to come closer.

Some people put them on while standing next to the coffin, others bent down closer to the tuft and a few visitors even made themselves comfortable on the floor while taking in the sound and the scene. The visual elements in the setting and the music collaborated to create a room of its own, a place of stillness and dignity. And I am curious to see how we can develop this interaction of sound, space and physical materials in other contexts.

Exhibition – Tonalities

By the end of May 2023 we participated in the graduation show *Tonalities* together with all the master and bachelor students from Campus Steneby, as a part of the event Southern Swedish Design Days in Malmö, Sweden. The exhibition space, a former locomotive workshop called Lokstallarna, was arranged as a fair and the 27 students shared an area of 150 square meters. Since the space was quite limited, Ewing and I chose to only bring two of the hanging tufts, the two tufts that were intended to lie on the floor and half our stock of yarn pellets, and I am quite happy about that decision. We extended the cable tie chains so that they would reach all the way to the 8 meter high ceiling, and decided that despite the floor of the industrial building being very rough, it was still important to place the horizontal tuft sculptures directly on the ground and not use any podium.

Our setting worked surprisingly well in this industrial context. As Ewing pointed out afterwards, the way the meat hooks and chains blended in with the environment actually benefited the textile objects, making their color and texture stand out even more. The pellets' connection to manufacturing also felt like a lucky match with the history of the building. Ewing and I were guarding the exhibition for several days and both of us noticed a certain fascination with the composite cylinders – visitors asking about them and taking pictures, one or two kids playing with them, and even some grownups picking one up for closer examination. This gave me a lot of inspiration to further develop the pellets, to maybe create some sort of workshop with them, or experiment with the yarn composite material itself for other purposes.

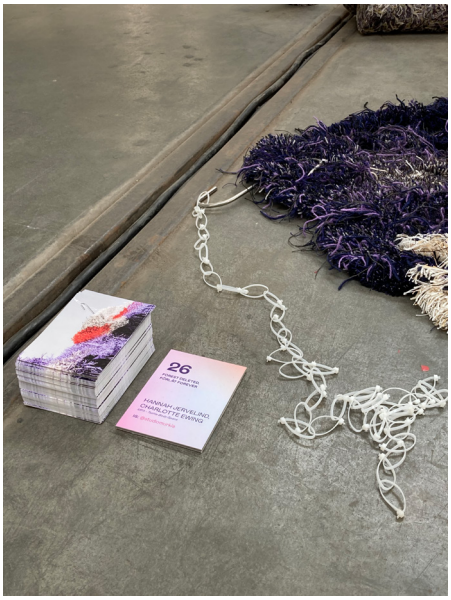


Figure 69-70: Pictures from *Tonalities*

Bodily interaction

With the input from the two exhibitions, I return to the initial question of how textile art can make death tangible to humans, to look closer at our sculptures' tactile properties. In the background I suggested that death in contemporary Sweden has lost some of its tactility, compared to the early 20th century when vigils were still common and included touching the deceased. I also related our choice of medium to this, referring to the tactile qualities of tufting. Connecting now to the vigil setting we have created, a tufted sculpture on a coffin-like podium and a requiem-inspired sound collaboration, one might ask – is it important to touch the tuft? Is the act of touching a crucial part of the mourning process?

I would say it is, for me. But I am a person who feels a strong need to touch almost everything to understand it. I do think many adults hold themselves back in that regard, but I also realize it might be less important to other people. The aspect of tactility can also be experienced by imagining what something feels like. The tufted fringe interacts with light and space, and even if I do not sense the coarseness of the wool with my hands, my visual impression gives a sense of materiality. Touching might enhance the experience, but engaging with a work existentially and emotionally can also just take place in someone's mind. That being said, I do think that the question is still relevant to bring into the development of our work.

Some people have suggested that the way we designed our podium might discourage people from bodily interaction with the tuft; visually communicating with its purple wooden sides and white shiny satin that what lies on top is too sacred to be touched. I think this is a very good point. During our process we experimented a lot to find the right balance between making something dignified yet approachable, but when we executed our podium sketch in the wood workshop time was short and we had to make very quick choices regarding materials and surface treatments. I am happy with the visual expression that came out, but in order to achieve interaction between object and audience, I think we still have to work on how we invite people into the setting. I do believe the cushions we planned on making could have supported our intentions in this regard.

Apart from developing the physical aspects and exhibit the vigil in a more secluded space, Ewing and I are also curious to see if a ceremony could help to frame our work better, enabling us to share a moment of grief with other people. Bylund's sound installation could be a part of this, but only playing it seems a little passive. In order to create a sense of community I feel the vigil needs more direction, or other elements.

Figure 71: Ewing stroking the tuft on the podium

I would like to go back to *The sawdust ritual* here. As we chose to specialize in tufting and focus our work on textile craft, we had to let go of that idea, and I believe it was a wise decision. But looking at the headline question, textile aside, I find that this ritual really served to make death tangible to us, and it would have been interesting to see if other people could get the same experience as we did from dancing with sawdust. The bodily interaction was so direct, which really helped me to connect with myself and my own emotions. Doing it together with Ewing, as a sort of micro community, intensified my feeling of being present in the moment. The ritual also had an interesting ambivalence to it; the tactility of the sawdust was extremely pleasurable while the dust produced from our movements was very harmful for our lungs (which we solved by wearing protection masks).

The aspect of rituals and ceremonies that we started to investigate in this project, still awaits further development. Looking ahead I bring the sawdust ritual with me as well, as inspiration for how to mourn with one's whole body.

Painting with yarn

Choosing the tufted medium as our main technique in this project was for me mainly based on two things – the possibilities to deepen my understanding of color and the idea that the tactile qualities of tufted objects carries potential for touch and affection. Some aspects of this technique have already been discussed; whether the vigil setting invited people to touch or not and how I started to see tufting as a physical output for my grief. But now I want to look closer at the visual expression of our craft, how it serves our theme and how it corresponds or contrasts with the works of other practitioners.

The tufted sculptures in *Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever* are full of vibrant colors. It is kind of a trademark of our practice, we are both constantly drawn to everything bright and saturated. But the tuft in the vigil sticks out a little, with all its beige, faded okra and grayish purple. The color palette we picked for that one was intended to contrast the others by looking sick and fragile, and therefore we also worked more with subtle shifts in nuances and smooth gradients.

In the making of this piece I felt like I discovered the power of beige. I used to hate that color in all its nuances, and now suddenly we have become best friends. What makes beige so elusive is also its greatest feature, it can be tinted with any color and consequently, in a very subtle way, push the overall color expression in that direction. And it is still beige. This makes it an unexpected but perfect partner for the bright and popping hues that Ewing and I are so fond of – the calm and solid parent to an energetic child.

This new approach to color relates to the work of the Swedish artist Camilla Iliefski (b. 1970). Iliefski has a background in graphic design, but now works mainly with hand tufting. In *Pouring red* (2022) she contrasts the center of deep red, magenta and burgundy with fields of beige, fading pink and hints of orange (fig. 72). Similar to our piece, the color expressions are elusive and change with closer examination. But while Ewing and I constantly alternate the length of the yarn to purposely make the fringe a bit messy, Iliefski works with a very thick and controlled surface, creating distinct fields with various lengths and sculpting the fringe afterwards with a scissor.

This neat finish really enhances her color work, and sometimes when I have tufted a particularly intricate little area I am tempted to do the same. But I think there is an interesting friction as well, in the fringe-style we have used so far. I like the imperfections, and when everything is not equally visible it is almost as if the tufts keep a few

Figure 72: *Pouring red*, by Camilla Iliefski

secrets of their own, hidden in all the hairiness.

Our approach to the tufted surface began with an intention to capture the essence of forest vegetation; the diversity in color, texture, length and density in the fringe resembles the way multiple species grow and interact with each other in micro and macro perspective. As I look for a continued development of our expression, I see some correspondence with Caroline Achaintre (b. 1969), a German-French multimedia artist working with ceramics, tufting and watercolor. Achaintre initially started making tufted objects as a way to translate drawings into real space (Saatchi Gallery, n.d.), and looking at her tufts I can sense the language of aquarelle in the slightly blurred colors and the long threads hanging down every here and there, resembling running paint.

In the piece *Mother George* (2015) the whole surface seems to be dissolving; the outlines of the canvas and the holes in it gives me the impression it is running downwards with the colors (fig. 73). Relating this to our objects and how we worked with ripping up holes, I find myself very inspired to further explore the deconstruction of the canvas. Now they are still solid objects, but what would happen if we pushed this

Figure 73: *Mother George*, by Carolina Achaintre

even more, dissolved the edges and blurred the line between canvas and space? Deconstructing the canvas could also be a way to explore tufting as a method for making three dimensional objects. We call the pieces from Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever sculptures, but their transformation from the canvas to the room is still quite humble – the hanging tufts bending slightly, the tufts on the floor rising in soft hills and turning back to flat surfaces. An artist we both have followed for a while now and who has inspired us to work with voluminous tufting is Maja Michaelsdotter Ericsson (b. 1985). In one of her more recent works, Pills (2022), she has tufted huge, realistic copies of three different medicines. The surface is treated as both three and two dimensional; the canvas is cut and sewn to a stuffed object, but the color is applied as a painting, with highlights on the upper side and shadowplay in the bottom (fig. 74).

Michaelsdotter's work is highly figurative and I see the overall aesthetic as quite far from my own and Ewing's practice. But the way she moves between dimensions fascinates me, and I think it resonates with how Achaintre merges the form language of different mediums; watercolor and tufting. With these two practices as challenging conversation partners and with the color approach we share with Iliefski, I look forward to further pushing our tuft expression, visually and spatially, and hopefully

Figure 74: Close-up on *Pills*, by Maja Michaelsdotter Ericsson

A shared headspace

Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever is not a project about collaboration, but it is completely based on it as a method and therefore I would like to take some time to reflect on our collaboration itself. Being in an academic context where the individual contribution always has to be evaluated, challenged the way Ewing and I talk about our practice, where doing everything together is our default mode. Suddenly, everyone wanted to understand who we were as individuals, what roles we took in the project and what separated the I from the we. I was conflicted at first, since the whole point of our dynamic was to merge our individual perspectives and driving forces into one cohesive artistic expression. I did not want to dissect it, and I was a bit annoyed with my surroundings for asking me to do so. It almost felt a little intrusive, like asking a couple about their relationship dynamic.

But studying full-time together for two years turned out to be a very intense experience that sometimes also strained our collaboration. Eventually I also felt the need to analyze it, to better understand how we can grow as a duo and still make space for our individual needs and aspirations.

I started looking at other artist duos based on female friendship, the first being Swedish artists Åsa Norberg (b.1977) and Jenny Sundén (b.1977). They have been collaborating since 2005, and like me and Ewing, developed a cohesive practice together. In an interview with Swedish curator Maria Lind (b. 1966), Nordberg and Sundén speak about a "common thinking" [gemensamt tänkande] to explain their collaborative process. They describe it as a particular headspace where they think differently and make other decisions than what they would do as individuals. The dialogue, analyzing and questioning things together, is the core of their practice (Norberg & Sundén, n.d.). This resonates with my own and Ewings way of describing our shared process as "an ongoing dialogue", the main difference being that I often find it hard to pinpoint how my individual thinking differs from the headspace I share with Charlotte.

We are both strong-willed and do not always agree on everything, initially. But my absolute faith in that whatever path we find together is stronger and more accurate that anything I can come up with on my own, beats any momentarily prestige. However, a side effect of blurring the I with the we, is that we sometimes do not recognize each other's boundaries. This has sometimes been a struggle when studying together so intensively and at the same time striving to make our work more intimate and personal than before. We can not always be in complete sync with emotions, intentions, or capacity of workload, but with a new awareness of this I think we can also be more creative with how we collaborate in the future.

In the book *Jag gör vi varje dag* [I make we every day], Swedish artist Johanna Gustavsson (b. 1974) draws a both poetic and very naked portrait of the friction in collec-

tive work and collective identities, especially in feminist and political contexts. What it means to "make we" in Gustavsson's texts is constantly shifting in scale; a study group reading Marx, a loving couple or a fictive letter exchange between the author and three famous women from the past. The book is fictional, and apart from the letter exchange, most of it is written like a stream of consciousness and it really resonated with me emotionally, like this quote:

> "Vi gick parallellt och vi pratade parallellt, jag vet inte om hon förstod mig men jag förstod inte henne. Jag var irriterad hela tiden. Så skulle hon hoppa på en buss och jag vet att jag borde ha förmildrat omständigheterna genom att säga nåt som tröstade henne, för jag tror hon fortfarande grät, men jag ville inte, för hela skiten kändes så jävla fel och orättvis." (Gustavsson, 2014)

> "We walked in parallel and we talked in parallel, I don't know if she understood me but I didn't understand her. I felt irritated the whole time. Then she had to jump on a bus and I know I should have tried to smooth things over by saying something comforting, I think she was still crying, but I didn't want to, cause the whole thing just felt so fucking wrong and unfair." (Gustavsson, 2014, my translation)

Making we in Gustavsson's book involves constant conflicts, both internal and external ones. How to make space for individual feelings and needs while striving for common goals? When I think about the friction in my collaboration with Ewing, and try to understand what causes it, I can rarely recall any particular disagreement about choice of material, color, scale or medium. It is rather the effort of communication that springs to mind; all the times we are too tired to explain or listen properly, too tired to synchronize so that we move at the same speed, both mentally and physically.

The headspace Norberg and Sundén refers to is not a fixed state of mind; once established – always accessible. It is a space of mobility, being constantly molded and moved in different directions by the both of us. Sometimes when Ewing is skeptical about an idea of mine it is only a matter of incubation time and two days later she is suddenly all on board with it. I, on the other hand, have learnt that even though the visions she presents often sound very concrete, they are always flexible in practice, and if I just allow her space to try it out it will result in something that represents the both of us.

Another example of artistic collaboration and friendship is Astrid Løvaas (b. 1957) and Kirsten Wagle (b. 1956), two Norwegian artists who has been working as a duo for over 40 years, which they also make a statement about in the beginning of their resume: "Har siden 1981 hatt et fullstendig samarbeide" [Have been together in complete collaboration since 1981] (Løvaas & Wagle, n.d., my translation).

In an interview with them from 1996, Ingrid Lydersen Lystad (b. 1943) describes

their friendly interaction during the conversation, how they exchange looks every once in a while, nods to each other and give positive feedback to what the other person says. Lydersen Lystad remarks that it is obvious how they want to share the attention equally.

I find myself very touched by the relationship depicted in this interview. When asked about how they handle disagreements, they refer to their analytic and straightforward discussions. Even if it can be tough sometimes, they do not retreat to politeness, but rather put everything on the table (Lydersen Lystad, 1996). I believe the honesty they advocate for is closely related to the kinship that the interview depicts.

Very few people have seen me in all sorts of shapes and situations, like the way Ewing has. And few people have such intimate knowledge of my shortcomings and vulnerabilities. But more importantly, we share some of the best moments in life together – making, speculating, discovering and playing. I do not think one thing would be possible without the other, and thus the answer is clear when people ask: *are you going to continue to work together after your master?* HELL YEAH!

IIII Final notes

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Conclusion & Result

Forest Deleted, Förlåt Forever has resulted in a textile, spatial body of work, that approaches the death of forest species from three angles; as a farewell, as an act of violence and as a chain in a production.

I believe our use of humanizing as an artistic approach was a good entry point for us to connect with red-listed critters and understand our own values. Through that we explored aspects of dignity and affection. But looking ahead, it might be limiting to continue to use that perspective. Separating ourselves from other critters by thinking in terms of human values and human practices might seem humble but it can also trick us into human exceptionalism, putting us back on the top of the hierarchy. A possible way to avoid this could be to look further into Haraway's idea of becoming-with, and initiate some sort of artistic collaboration with other species.

From the two different exhibitions where either the whole series of objects or parts of them has been showcased, Ewing and I have gained some experience of how different rooms can influence the reading of the work. We have also developed our understanding of spatial composition, and started using light as a tool to set the right atmosphere.

Creating settings with our pieces has been one part of investigating how textile art can make the death of species more tangible to humans; looking into how space and ceremony can serve as tools to connect people with our textile objects. When working only with space, the mourning aspect of our project became less obvious, and expecting people to interact with the tuft in the vigil scene without a clear invitation, turned out to be a little too optimistic. I bring this insight with me into a future continuation of the project, where I also want to experiment more with creating some sort of ceremony.

The other part of making death tangible has been to explore visual and tactile qualities of tufting. In the making process we aimed to capture death and decay, the essence of biodiversity and bodily fragility. Contextualizing the tufted sculptures by placing them on the floor, hanging them in meat hooks, or making references to human vigils was a storytelling tool we used to enhance our theme

Sometimes I feel that the associations to slaughter or ceremonies are too literal, but in order for us to connect all the layers in this project, I think a certain amount of visual clarity was needed. That being said, it might be helpful to define a more limited framework next time, or to select one part of this research to develop into a project of its own. Spending two years with the forest theme has taught me the difficulties

Figure 75-76: Climbing down to change yarn in the tuft gun

of creating such an extensive material for oneself, but I am happy for the experience.

Two years of working full time in one long artistic process with Ewing has also given me new insights to our collaboration, and helped me to define and describe it more clearly to other people. Learning about the practices of Norberg and Sundén, and Løvaas and Wagle, has made me curious to look for more female artist duos, and eventually start a dialogue where we can share and compare our collaborative methods, and learn from our different practices.

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Image index

Word list

Call-and-response – a method for collaboration where one person make something that someone else correspond to
Critter – a term coined by Donna Haraway, referring to all sorts of living beings
Fläckporing *(Anthoporia albobrunnea)* – a fungi species
Knärot *(Goodyera repens)* – an orchid species
Prydnadsbock *(Anaglyptus mysticus)* – an insect species
Puderspindling *(Cortinarius aureopulverulentus)* – a fungi species
Raggtaggsvamp *(Hydnellum mirabile)* – a fungi species
Savlundlav *(Bellicidia incompta)* – a lichen species
Styvfoting – *(Mythicomyces corneipes)* – a fungi species