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A PLACE FOR UNFINISHED MEMORIES

MFA in Medium and Material-based Art

Art and Craft

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Introduction

From an early age, I remember being fascinated with derelict sites and the images and stories about prehistoric caves, Egyptian pyramids, medieval castles, gothic cathedrals, and the second World War.

One of my memories related to this fascination is a mountain with a rocky top situated close to the small village where I lived. At the bottom of this mountain, there was an asphalt road which we frequently drove by as I was sitting in my parents' car or on the bus to school. I looked at those rocks at the top of the mountain and imagined a cave entrance, hiding behind bushes, and entering an interior full of mysterious and amazing things. But I never went there even when I had the opportunity. By not going there, I created a place in my imagination that continues believing in the possibility of this cave still existing.

This project is made from things present all around us that are part of and an influence on our lives but always have passed unnoticed, or at least we look at them as empty vessels. The possibility to change the values of ordinary things is also a way to create mystery around them and allow the stimulation of our imagination without the necessity to find answers and keep the unknown also to be part of our lives.

I have blurry images in my mind of entering abandoned old buildings and the excitement of these adventures. At the age of fourteen, I moved to a small city in the south of Portugal (Lagos), surrounded by beaches and long warm summers that made the region attractive for tourism. (image1)

The region has a history strongly connected to the sea and the fishing industry. The tourism industry overtook the fishing occupation, resulting in many abandoned buildings. Today, one can observe the preserved chimneys of these bygone factories used as support pillars for storks' nests. (image2)

There are other types of ruins in the south of Portugal, in the Algarve region; these ruins are all around the country. The abandonment of these places relates to bad investments, the 1972 world oil crisis, the 1974 revolution against the fascist dictatorship that led to the implementation of the democratic regime and enormous structural and social changes in the country, shaping the regional development and the architectonic aesthetics.

The result was scattered ruins and derelict structures, in visual contrast to the new touristic villas and hotels. These abandoned places have negative connotations for the local population, producing a sense of shame. Maybe because abandonment is seen as a reflection of failure, however, they were a place to explore, an area of excitement, and a refuge where I felt free.

Today I understand that these places are monuments that I had the privilege of being part of and now are part of me, becoming tools and media for my creative process as an artist.



Image1- Overview of the city of Lagos/Portugal

[Vista aérea de belas falésias e praia perto da cidade de lagos, na costa do algarve em portugal | Foto Grátis \(freepik.com\)](#)



Image2

[two algarve storks.jpg \(400x600\) \(meravista.com\)](#)



Image3 - Street view of a typical small village where I used to live.

[Barão de São João - Lagos | Guia para visitar em 2022 - oGuia \(guiadacidade.pt\)](#)

I became aware recently that another subject is influencing my practice: the construction industry.

My family owned a wood transformation and carpentry business. I grew up in an environment of materials for construction, machinery, and crafts. I have experienced this factory environment, first as an observer and as a playground, then as a helper in the processes from cutting wood in the forest to the first wood beam at the house to the last details of the wooden furniture.

Another aspect of my life impacted the person I have become. It is related to religion, the struggle to become free, and the psychological consequences that created the need to learn how to adapt and become part of and accepted by the community around me. I am not sure how this is present in my work because it is not a subject of focus now, but I feel it around me all the time, and in a way, it is also present in the things that I am creating.

Contemporary ruins and memory

My thoughts on memories of derelict places, buildings, and structures, together with a need to find and have a subject that I could establish as being part of my practice, led me for a period to adopt the term *contemporary ruins* as the complementing element that I needed in my practice. This term appeared to me in the book “RUINS”, *Documents of Contemporary Art*.ⁱ And from this moment, this term was like an obsession in my head, but it had also presented me with artists and concepts that somehow or at some point had recent ruins as part of their practice.

It was also helping me to have a feeling that the more recent these places had become abandoned, the better. Also, it is more exciting for me as an “explorer” if these places are of non-historical importance. Besides my personal past experiences, this preference is that they do not attract attention from other people. An aura surrounds these places, eager for attention like an abandoned animal. It also allows me to be the one to explore it, to show care, and find things, objects, materials, textures, and colours in a natural stage, not disturbed and following the cycle of the passing of time.

I understood that these recent ruins were authentic, filled with an energy/aura utterly different from the typical historical places that besides their historical value, they are also treated to become tourist attractions, creating an artificial atmosphere surrounding these monuments. Also, the possibility to uncover exciting stories or history around the place chosen to explore, and bring out, make it somehow part of my work that may become the catalyst for a conversation, a story to tell the curious observer.

I see a contemporary ruin as raw and smelly, with moisture, junk, scary, and dangerous, and at the same time playful, mysterious, and attractive.

It can be an abandoned structure with a function, but it can also be unfinished with a construction process that was suddenly interrupted. It can also be derelict places still in use.



Image4 – “As Torres” That is how the locals call these abandoned buildings in Lagos/Portugal



Image5 – Intervention at the Grüner sports club together with the artist Stan D’Haene
2022

In contrast to my hometown, I had difficulties finding recently abandoned structures around Oslo. This created a challenge: How could the concept of contemporary ruins still be relevant?

I felt the need to free myself from these auto-induced limitations created by the feeling that I needed to be under the subject of the contemporary ruins. I needed to open the landscape again and find ramifications, hoping this way to unveil alternative routes with a broader field of possibilities.

There is a relation between contemporary ruins and my memories, so it made sense that memories should become one of these ramifications allowing me to go deeper into my experiences connected to these places.

When exploring these memories, I also felt strong connections with my family, my personal experience with the construction industry, and the perception of a relationship between the building up and the decay of a structure. There is an intermediate stage during both processes where they meet while going in opposite directions. This must be the reason why I feel that I am building structures that are not supposed to be finished and where decay is already part of the building process.

Materials and process

The focus of my practice to this moment has been sculpture and objects. Recently, I have been trying to create the possibility for my sculpture work to be part of /or used as an installation.

The most common materials used in my work are stones, steel, wood, concrete and Plexiglas, acrylic paint, and leftovers of paint; in interaction with found objects from construction sites, derelict structures, and the reuse of older objects part of experimental works. I am using printed images related to memory, where the themes are based on personal experiences. I also create paintings based on processes of decay in architectonic environments.

Stone is a material that “came” with me from Portugal. I learned the traditional masonry method of carving limestone by creating gothic stone ornaments from monasteries. But to develop replicas was not fulfilling my artistic vision, and I initiated a prolonged process between 2003 to 2012 of experimentation with stone sculpting.

I moved from Portugal to live in Norway in 2013. I was confronted with difficulties and obstacles in continuing as a stone sculptor. I started experimenting with materials from Biltema that I would take to a five-meter square basement and build things to keep the creation instinct alive. And now, I'm at KHiO with my own working space and conditions that allow me to create almost anything that crosses my mind.

Being part of the bachelor's studies in the jewellery and metal department was somehow unexpected. I had never been much interested in jewellery, but I saw good potential for my

future practice in metalwork, complemented by a long-time wish of assembling stone and steel.

Anyway, I tried it with jewellery by challenging myself out of my comfort zone. I learned a lot by being part of the studies and workshops around the theme of jewellery. I became aware of exciting concepts with materials and techniques that revealed diverse ways of seeing and understanding material and materiality, symbolism, and objects. Also, important to not be afraid of experimentation and accept that besides all my years of experience with stone sculpture, I can learn, experiment, and not take my time using the school as a workshop space to create what I already know that I am good at.

However, I understood that I was starting to force myself into this experience that did not feel the right way to express myself.

I enjoyed forging, welding, and corpus, where I practised with steel and copper. This way, I created objects of small dimensions with diverse types of assemblages using granite stone, steel, copper, wood, marble, plaster, and casting in bronze. The result of this experience is something of which I am still proud. (images6;7;8)

All this helped me relieve myself from the strong dependency I felt on the sculpture with stone. It was like anything else, but stone carving is worth creating sculptures, except bronze. And from this moment, steelwork has become part of my materials of choice, creating a broader field of possibilities, transforming my stone working experience from a dependency to a plus. However, I wished to achieve total freedom and become able to use any material.

After looking around for things related to contemporary ruins, concrete stood out constantly because it is the most used in construction. It is easy to use and has endless possibilities for creation. It also added an entirely new way of thinking about my creative and conceptual practice. It changed my thinking and creation process drastically because I used to have a raw material that I shaped by removing material until I achieved a result; it could be improvisation or a precise replica of an object. Now it is the other way around, with the creation of wood casting moulds, steel reinforcements, adding things inside the castings, and building structures formed by several modules.

Concrete interacted perfectly with steel and allowed my work to be placed in the stage of constructing something new, or of decay, deconstruction.

It is probably the most underrated of the materials, but after some research, I understood that it is the primary material used by the Brutalist architectonic movement.

However, I do not feel that what I do is related to Brutalism or even Art brut movements, maybe because of the word "brutalist". My concrete pieces are not brute; I see them as fragile, unfinished, or decaying. They are made of many kilos of concrete and steel, but they are also light; they are open, almost floating, and the air can pass through them almost without opposition. This is not brutalism, but still, it will be difficult to avoid these associations. Besides that, my intention was never to create sculptures and structures based on a style or a movement, but ideas related to perception around abandonment, decay,

construction, deconstruction, unfinished, memory and imagination that somehow may become metaphors for human behaviour, social systems, beliefs, life, and death.

There is a strong connection between me and the work with wood, and for this reason, I do not wish to use it as a building material in my works. I see wood as a symbolic material because of its strong connection to my past.

We have a traditional saying in Portugal: "Blacksmith's house, wooden skewer." It's a popular saying used when you want to say that a person is skilled at a specific thing but doesn't use that skill to his advantage.

The sculpture/installation "*Frageis recreios/skjør lekeplass*" assembles concrete, steel, random objects, and wood. The concept around this piece is my experience and connection to the wood transformation industry. It is a work inspired by the piling and storage of wood. However, it was vital for me to do this work in concrete, so the small portion of the wood that is part of the work gained a symbolic connotation. (image9)

Acrylics and Plexiglas are my new materials undergoing an experimental period. Sometimes things come to us without understanding why they attract us. And this is one of those situations, and I am very interested in exploring it. Therefore, I feel I should follow my instincts. One of the explanations that I may have for the willingness to have these materials in my practice is my fascination for futuristic aesthetics, movies, and technologies.

Besides this fascination and after practice with these materials, I understood that I liked their materiality, shape, build, and play. The transparency and colours of these materials are opposites to what I have been using and working with, which is also a motive of attraction and interest.

But coloured transparent acrylics are expensive, so I performed try-outs with cheaper opal Plexiglas. It is possible to create an unfocused image when having an object on the backside from the side we are looking at. So here is the beauty of accidental findings because now I have a material that can recreate a poetic image of how we perceive memory. (image10)

During the first semester of this master's studies, I had the wish that there was a possibility to include painting in my graduation project (image11).

The study and exploration of contemporary ruins made me more aware of details like the old layers of paint and wallpaper that fell apart when left derelict, revealing the distinct colours and patterns underneath. These observations led me to realise experiments with acrylics on canvas. One day I decided to use sandpaper on the surface of one of my acrylic paintings on a cardboard canvas and see what would happen. The result of this experiment triggered something in me that is leading to a continuous search since then, and it does not look like it will stop.

But because I feel that it is still on an experimental stage, and for some reason, I also felt that by comparing it with the other experimental works taking place simultaneously, the best to do

was to continue to have it as a side project and not to have it on my graduation, because I also felt the need to relieve myself from the amount of experimental work I was doing and to centre my focus on the other two possible projects.



Image6- Object in steel and granite stone.
Size- 60x10x10cm
2018



Image7- Object in patinated steel,
marble, forged steel.
Size- 50x25x16cm
2018



Image8- Object in forged steel.
Size 10x13x13cm
2019

Sustainability

Concerns about my environmental footprint are also present in the way I practice. For example, sometimes, my choice of materials to work with makes me restless because they may give the impression that I do not consider their impact on the environment. But I do, in a way that is not the most obvious when we see my work's result, and this is because it is primarily present during the process itself. Part of the building components I use is purchased. Still, I try to compensate for the use of the new by reusing other ones of anterior works, such as construction and mounting materials and leftovers. Besides sparing new materials and money, these working methods influence the result and the active process. Also, working with casting moulds allows me to create pieces that are later assembled to create a large dimensions piece. I also try to use the same casting moulds until they fall apart, which is not just a sustainable option. It is also a characteristic that physically and visually influences the casting and final works results. This way, I manage to have decay present during the working process, creating a new work already affected by decay, which is a fascinating aspect. (image27;28)

It is also important to underline here the reusability of the artwork. I see that many artists throw out or destroy their works if there are not sold after an exhibition. It may be for lack of storage space, the temporary aspect of the work or installation, or they feel they are done with it. These are issues that have always created unrest in me and have been influencing my working processes. I decided to explore puzzle techniques with materials and the creation of works formed by modules due to limitations of space and transport. Later I saw that these working methods allowed the possibility to change the form of the pieces and create new works. I have as the first example the work first exhibited at Kunsthall Oslo as the "*Wall*" (image12), and later it was reused for the sculpture triennial from Billedhoggerforening (image13). At the time, the sustainability aspect of reusing this work was not what led me to do it. Still, from that moment, I understood that this method could become one of the characteristics of my practice, and from here, I also understood that this way, I am also creating a sustainable art practice.

It is also essential for me to underline this subject because I became aware that when sustainability is approached, it is about recycling or highlighting sustainable and natural materials, but not about sustainable working and exhibiting methods.



Image9- Detail "Frageis recreios/sjkør lekeplass"



Image10- Detail "Daydreaming"



Image11- "Revelations 2" Acrylic on canvas 80x120cm



Image12- "The Wall"

Materials- Recycled granite stone, Steel, Found objects.

Size- 100x240x120cm

Kunsthall Oslo"

2019



Image13- Title- "It's closer than it looks"

Sculpture

Materials- Recycled granite stone, Steel, Found objects.

Size- 200x240x120cm

2021

SkulpturTriennalen/Billedhoggerforening

References

As I continued focusing on contemporary ruins, references to artists, works, and movies related to ruins or decay became frequent. It is like when we notice things that have always been before us when they gain a new level of importance for a reason.

This new awareness and not feeling alone in this search helped create new confidence and go deeper into experimentation.

The eye-opener was the movie *Stalker*, 1979 by Andrei Tarkovsky. (image14) I watched this movie during the middle working stage with the piece “*The Wall*”, which made me understand that it is possible to create art with and inspired by derelict and neglected places. That in this movie can be looked up as predicting the future. The Chernobyl incident happened seven years after the movie’s release. Still, we could say that this area of Chernobyl is the inspiration for creating the film.

The beauty of the movie photography, the landscapes, and how nature evolves and takes back these decaying places create a visual and attractive balance between opposites. From this point, I started to find frequently art references to contemporary ruins.

The film/documentary/artwork *Ruinas*, 2009, by Manuel Mosos, (image15) took me back to Portugal, the sun, the colours, and the smells of a country that was constantly struggling, looking to the future but living the pride from the achievements of the past. But that also filled me with nostalgic feelings from places that are now distant from my daily life and that I am going back to in my memories to use in my creative process.

The Movie “*Satan's Tango*” by Bella Tarr 1994 (image16) took me on a different journey. It is a humanised reflection of the ruination of a society and its effects on people and communities. It establishes a connection between abandon of social structures and the decay of a community that leads to the individual's disorientation and consequent collapse. Eventually, the individual becomes a living ruin himself.

During my studies, I became curious about Robert Smithson. (image17) I saw references to him all around. I was not amazed by the work I had seen from him, but I was interested to understand why he is such a reference inside the art community.

After some readings, I was still not very amused by his work, but seeing the Spiral Jetty and other works made more sense.

What I mostly enjoyed about him it is his writings and the way he challenged and questioned the art scene and art movements. It helped me to become more comfortable with the idea that it is “allowed” not to follow the trends and say, I do not like this, or, I have my view, I do not need to be part of a group to create art, even having a close connection with the minimalist movement he didn’t want to be seen as a minimalist.

Another important aspect is how he explored and interacted with the materials and their materiality. The values and symbolism can create interactions between the material, space, and the observer.

But the aspect that made me see Robert Smithson as a reference is his interest in the construction processes, like quarries, and his interaction and cooperation with the construction industry. Here I felt a connection that I thought about and why it sounded so familiar.

Anselm Kiefer is also an essential reference, but for distinct reasons. (image18) What first caught my attention in his work was the aesthetics.

The way he uses the materials, the colours, the way it feels that the works are on a ruination process, the compositions, and the sculptural works.

It was possible to see that symbolism was a powerful aspect of his work, and it is also something that has been attracting me for a long time.

His work is full of objects and materials related to his memories, references to the second world war and fascism, mysticism, and the kabbalah.

After becoming more familiar with his work, I felt inspired and motivated to have symbolic objects in my pieces. From this point, I initiate the inclusion of found objects from construction sites or renovation of old buildings. It can also be personal objects that are not in use or carry symbolic attachment to me and, more recently, printed images related to friends, family, or places that have also been part of my life.

Eduardo Souto de Moura is a Portuguese worldwide known architect. It makes sense to have an architect as a reference when I see my practice's path. My attention was attracted to him because he interacted with ruins during his career. Not historical ruins but typical house structures that had fallen in abandonment. (image19)

The most amazing is that the interventions that he creates are not just of renovation or replacement; they are of inclusion and protection. This is what fascinates me mostly around his work during this period. He creates a balance between old and new that feels right, non-intrusive, and unique.

Einstürzende Neubauten, formed in 1980, is an Industrial music group initially formed in West Berlin, Germany. They are known for creating their original instruments made of scraps from industrial sites and tools used in construction and performing inside abandoned structures. (image20)

It may be my oldest reference and the one I am more familiarised which significantly impacted me. Now I understand that it is also an essential reference as an artist. I listened to them for the first time around 1997, and immediately they had a significant impact on me. It is a band little known in the mainstream, but when I listened to their music, they were already a reference as a cult band in the underground environment.

The translation of the German name means “collapsing new buildings,” and I think this resumes the many reasons to place them here as a reference.



Image14- [Stalker by Andrei Tarkovsky \(592CI\)](#) — [Atlas of Places](#)



Image15- [voz off: Ruínas - Manuel Mozos \(5 de Novembro, Sede, 21h30\)](#) ([ccbarreiro.blogspot.com](#))



Image16- [Béla Tarr - Sátántangó AKA Satan's Tango \(1994\) | Cinema of the World \(worldscinema.org\)](#)



Image17- [robert smithson partially buried woodshed - Bing images](#)



Image18- [These are Anselm Kiefer's teetering towers – Public Delivery](#)



Image19- [Casa en Moledo by Eduardo Souto de Moura \(460AR\) — Atlas of Places](#)



Image20- [Einsturzende Neubauten Halber Mensch - YouTube](#)

Works

The moment I started to have my first impressions, thoughts about ruins, and experimentation around the processes of decay on materials, came simultaneously with the opportunity to realise my long wish to assemble my new experiments with stone at this place named Steinskulptur in Oslo, Hølsfyr.

This place belongs to Billedhoggerforening and is rented by a graveyard stone company that shares the space with artists, members of this institution and students from KHiO.

This way, I found a place to work with granite stone. Here I decided to make something where I assembled my stonework experience and fascination with ruins with the new materials and knowledge.

I induced on myself the challenge of recycling granite tombstones that would assemble with steel experiments that I was making simultaneously, creating an ancient/industrial assemblage that would be at the same time traditional and contemporary cooperation between materials and crafts. (image12)

These choices triggered memories from the times spent inside the abandoned places mentioned before (image4). Around this period, my thoughts started to explore my memories of abandoned structures that made up part of my youth.

This endured for months and resulted in the work "*The Wall.*" And about the time I finished the sculpture, my thoughts were already distancing from the wish to use ancient ruins and traditional crafts as subjects. They had been replaced with memories of abandoned structures that were part of my life and that I felt personally connected to.

I need to mention that this was a work that I enjoyed a lot to create, and that allowed me to have some time in a familiar environment that also helped me relax and think. It is a work that opened the doors for the exhibitions at Nitja Senter for Samtidskunst, Lillestrøm, and the sculpture triennial at Billedhoggerforening in Oslo.

The memories and thoughts from this period are about when my friends and I used to go and play inside this massive abandoned unfinished structure as a youngster, and the feelings of excitement, danger, mystery, and protection like a fortification attached to this place.

During this period, I was also looking for something to use as the theme for my bachelor's graduation project here at KHiO and following up on this will; I initiated research on this derelict and unfinished structure abandoned in 1974, supposed to become a tourist hotel in my hometown, Lagos/Portugal. (image4)

To help understand why I was "surrounded" by ruins and why they are so influential to me, I can explain a little of what I found by researching this building.

The reasons to build the Hotel are the economic changes in the Nordic countries that created a new middle-class with the capacity to travel and go on holiday, facilitated by the more affordable and rise of charter flights. It initiated a flow of tourists to the region, and with the flow came money, new opportunities, and the necessity to adapt.

Understanding the new economic possibilities for a poor region led to the explosion of the tourism industry and the new architectonic construction necessary and adapted to tourism. But the changes came with consequences, like the shifting from traditional occupations like the fishing industry and agriculture that led to the abandonment of many factories in this region, which is still possible to find.

But the building I choose is different. It was destined for the new coming tourist. The reasons that provoked its abandonment may be the unsustainable frenzy from big corporations around the coastline lands. The initiation of speculation by the construction industry led to new protection laws related to urbanism on the seacoast, followed by the world oil crisis of 1972 and the revolution against the fascist dictatorship on 25 April 1974.

This derelict structure is still standing today because of law issues between the corporation responsible for the financial investment and the local community that bought shares to help with the financing, creating a vast process where no agreement was ever possible.

With this information, I initiated the work *"Monuments for the Sun"*, a group of four human-sized sculptures made of concrete, steel, and traditional Portuguese souvenirs. (image21)

I chose to work with concrete and steel because they are the base materials on the abandoned building. The shapes of the modules that are part of the pieces are inspired by the columns and walls of the structure. The sizes are inspired by standardised measurements based on human dimensions, directing me to create works close to or related to the human measures. The use and incorporation of tourist souvenirs inside the concrete modules are connected to my readings on Anselm Kiefer, which helped me be more comfortable with the use of symbolic objects, which leads me to think about the themes present in our local souvenirs destined for tourists. I found exciting contradictions that I decided to make part of the work. As an example, these souvenirs have as a theme the traditional occupations and aesthetics from the local population that were common before the arrival of the tourists, before all the changes that occurred with their appearance. Still, the tourist is taking it as a remembrance back home of something that they did not witness and that the main reason for that is his presence there.

The title's inspiration is the region's sunny summers, the abandoned structure's function, and its historical value. The work was exhibited at Trafo Kunsthall (Asker) in January 2001, the group exhibition *"If we build it, they will come"*.



Image21- "Monuments for the Sun"

Sculpture/Installation

Materials- Concrete, Steel, Local souvenirs from Lagos, Portugal

Size- Variable

Group exhibition- Trafo Kunsthall 2021



Image22- Detail- Tourist souvenirs.

With an invitation to be part of a group exhibition "*New Horizons, Ephemeral Style*" at Nitja Senter for Samtidskunst in August 2021, and with the feeling that I should somehow continue working similarly to my anterior work, I found myself researching Lillestrøm's past, and I found something that triggered dormant memories.

I grew up having the forest where they cut down the trees and the wood workshop where they processed the wood as my kindergarten.

The house we lived in, and the carpentry were merged, almost as one structure. In front of the house, there was a large terrain (open space) where processed wood was stored or left drying out before it went to the carpenters. The piling and storage of this wood created a vast playground for a young child like me at the time.

This exhibition invitation led me to find something that could relate to how my practice was taking direction and research the area and the past of Lillestrøm. The references and images of the wood industry started to appear frequently. I understand that the Lillestrøm area has grown from this industry with dozens of factories (Dampsag) for wood processing. The river Nitelva and Sagelva are significant as energy and transport resources. Not the same process used by my family, but I felt a connection when looking at the images of the factories: the smells, the sounds, the textures, and tactile sensations. This connection kept me searching until I found a photograph with a woodpile put to dry in an outdoor space and displayed in a triangular shape. (image23) It triggered memories that I had not expected to come back. But it did because I used to help my family create the same type of woodpiles, and when I finished the work, it became my playground, fortresses, hiding places, and labyrinths, where mysterious things could happen.

I became fascinated with the idea that these memories came back to me, triggered by something happening in such a distant place, making me feel connected with the people and the area.

The choice of concrete and the unfinished aspect of the work is related to the house and the conditions we lived in and to the sensation of mixed feelings of shame with the feelings of playfulness and being a child.

As I mentioned before, using a small portion of the wood is to have a symbolic value of wood to me.

The thoughts around these mixed feelings and the revival of these old memories of a distant place led to the title, in Portuguese and Norwegian, "*Frageis recreios/Skjør lekkeplas*".

(image24)



Image23-

Strømmens_Bygningsnekkeri_Verkstedets_ førsteetasje



Image24- Title- "Frageis recreios/ Skjør lekeplass"

Sculpture/Installation

Materials- Concrete, Steel, Wood, Found objects

Size- variable dimensions- The tallest with 200cm/base 80cmØ

Group exhibition/ Nitja, Senter for Samtidskunst (Lillestrøm)

2021

Due to the Corona pandemic circumstances, I had to work and prepare simultaneously for the exhibition at Nitja and the Sculpture Triennial from Billedhoggerforeningen 2021. (image13) Here I displayed the sculpture titled *"It's closer than it looks,"* made of recycled graveyard granite stone, steel and materials frequently used in construction sites. Here is also where I applied for the first time the concept of reusing an anterior work, "The wall". (image12) Because I was going to recycle the stone available at "Steinskulptur", I had to adapt my idea to the material available. In this case, were stones with relative standardised sizes commonly used on graveyards. It is possible to recycle them for many different reasons, and if not recycled, they will be sent to be transformed into gravel. The construction of my work evolved from here and from the problem of how I could create a relatively large sculpture without having to pay for a big stone, and that would simplify my life in terms of transport. The image of the famous and magnificent ancient puzzle-like walls of buildings and structures in South America came to my head. I also saw an opportunity to create steel pieces to be added in between the granite stones; also, it was here that I started to introduce found objects from construction sites into my work.

At some point, I felt that I was creating an abstract painting with all the different granite colours with the oxidated steel, which influenced shape and composition.

Created during my 2nd year at the bachelor's, it was first exhibited at Oslo Kunsthall. After this exhibition in 2019, it stayed demounted under my desk for two years until the opportunity to have it at the sculpture triennial.

Here, the development that I had been through to the present time was applied to create the steel structure supporting the stone wall, which was already a consequence of my new interest in unfinished facilities and construction sites and inspired by the works presented by Trafo and Nitja. This became cooperation between ruins from different times, between opposites of materials, techniques, and space. It became a work where a connection happened between my past background as a stone sculptor in Portugal with more traditional ways of thinking and working, to the consequences of adaptation to a new country and life, busted with the intense need to evolve.

Entering the memory space

My first year as a master's student was filled up almost entirely with working for the exhibitions at Nitja and Billedhoggerforening. After this exciting and hardworking period, I decided to dedicate my second year's first semester to research and experimentation.

At the start of the semester, I was still too connected to the works created for these exhibitions, and I also felt that it was necessary to find a new subject related to contemporary ruins. However, this necessity also felt like pressure, which didn't feel right. At the same time, there was a growing need to free up space, do a reset and start again.

I understood that I needed to open the landscape and look for ramifications. This time, I felt that I should find something different, not ruin or a place, either a place in the surroundings or a site in Portugal.

And what I started to see was that this time I could be the place, I could be the resource. Perhaps all I needed was within me, inside of me.

These thoughts are a consequence of undergoing these last years into the subject of contemporary ruins, which helped me to understand my connections to these places, which are responsible for emotions and perception that I have been translating to the spectator with materials, form, space, textures, and objects, working process and craft.

The person I have become reflects all this information and experiences, all these ruins and unfinished places inside of me, all these new structures being built, and all these places being remodelled—what a fascinating and, at the same time, scary place to explore.

I had the feeling that memory is a universal subject around artists, and that has been something that I thought I should avoid; I have always been afraid of following trends. I did not decide that memory should be my research subject. Instead, it is me becoming aware. It results from years of interaction with issues that always lead me to contact with personal experiences, making it a unique topic that I am not forcing to be part of my practice.

My first thought on approaching my memory, and without losing the thread that led me here, was to work with one strong image of a house where I lived as a kid. I would initiate the project by writing about this memory, which would also be part of this thesis.

At the same time, I initiated some experimentation with materials and painting. That way, I should spend the semester creating and researching to have something more concrete and ready to work on at the start of the second semester.

When thinking, analysing, and writing about these memories, I felt that they were very personal because I write in a very realistic way, to the point that I started to wonder if I should continue; there were too many details, too many sad things coming out. I am looking for sincerity, which is a good thing, but it also feels like unnecessary exposure, and I am not looking for pity. That is not the reason why I want to be an artist. Everyone has their struggles, and I should respect that.

But the image of this memory from the house never left my thoughts.

I painted, experimented with plexiglass, and tried out new concrete castings during this experimental period. I created, read, and searched until I understood that I had three exciting different ways to go and that one of them could become the chosen one for the graduation project. Maybe it would be possible to assemble two of these experiments in the end.

But I also believe that it is tough to let it go when I create something because we can get very attached to it. I had to try to understand which projects had the graduation requirements.

These three projects are connected somehow by having ruins, time, and memory as combined aspects.

I enjoy creating these paintings, and I find the results exciting and open. But I also see that it is still in an initial stage; I have not spent the time I wished to try out all kinds of different ideas and experiments that come through my mind. It is still so much that I wanted to try out, and I did not feel that painting would be part of the final work; (image11), and by taking it as a side project, I would relieve myself to have more time and dedication to the other two projects.

Working with plexiglass was also something that I felt I needed to do. It is a very different material from what I am used to working with. It is light and easy to cut and glue. It is also an entirely new way to think and develop the working process. (image25;26)

The possible visual results and the transparency also are exciting. I have chosen this semi-opal plexiglass because of its price and accessibility. But because of that and to use it to do experiments, I understood that this semi-opal quality was perfect, which created an unfocused image of an object when placed on the opposite side from the one we are looking at. I saw a good analogy for creating images of our memories in our brains and thoughts. Also, the level of clarity or the level of shadow or image placed on the back of the sheet of plexiglass varies with the different distances we have in between them, allowing me to decide to which degree I want this object or image to be perceived, how clear or unfocused this memory has become. I started to create memory boxes with 25x55x03cm (the shape of a stone wall). These boxes are placed on the wall with a space between the wall and the box of 5cm. This space is to allow light to come from the backside. Also, that helps to have a little natural or room light coming through the plexiglass, allowing colours and shapes to become more visible. But I saw the possibility to try out and place on the back and attached to the wall a stripe of led light that creates a much brighter and shining result. I like this result, but I also felt that it gives the work a more commercial outcome. It may create distancing from poetic values that are more sincere when I have just the natural light option, making it a more coherent solution. I placed objects and later paper prints related to my memory in these boxes. They can be connected to personal experiences, or they can be triggers of memories and stories, but I am also adding things that I am not sure why I am choosing to be part of the work. And this aspect is also present in other works. I had not thought much about why I do this, but I felt the necessity to do it. But now I understand that I am creating a mystery by doing this. Not everything needs to have a reason or an explanation in my work. I also deserve to be challenged by my creations. It is a good challenge that does not allow when I am finished that I feel tired of it; but on the contrary, it will continue to make me wonder about it and find connections and poetic translations.

However, this was not going to be my graduation project. Not because I do not think it had the necessary elements to be chosen, but because I was at the same time working on the other work that I started to feel a stronger connection to what should be my graduation work.

So, I also decided to let this project rest and dedicate all my energy and time to the chosen and final option during the second semester.



Image25- "Daydreaming"

Size- 75x175x07cm

2022



Image26- "Daydreaming"

With led light.

Size- 75x175x07cm

2022

My decision was taken. But I need to mention that I was not alone and that the options I was taking had the support or were also influenced by teachers and colleagues. All the group critics, tutorials, and conversations about what I was doing influenced my decisions because I explained my ideas and exposed my doubts. And after that, I analysed the comments and the critics that were significant factors in my choices.

The monument I have chosen to become my graduation project is a continuation, affirmation, acceptance, and, most importantly, mystery.

My first idea and the project's starting point were to take further the concept, ideas, and progress made and learned from my anterior works. I wanted to create something that would allow me to play around with forms, spaces, and display, and at the same time work with the metamorphic characteristics that can change shape, adapt, and maybe later be reused and become a new piece.

With these goals in mind, my first idea was to create a simplified wooden casting module with a geometric puzzle shape that could be repeated and assembled endlessly. And this shape became the element that would influence the progress and all the process. At the same time, I was going to try to use the minimum amount of wood for the casting modules to be reused as many times as possible to the point that the deterioration of the wooden modules started to be part of my concept with the creation of imperfections and textures, allowing for decay to be part of the working method, and creating this way cooperation between, materials, and working sustainable processes. (images27;28)

I became aware and attracted to the way materials are displayed and stored in the company that sells them for the construction industry and where I have been buying mine.

When I go to a place where they sell products for the construction industry, and when walking around looking for what I need, I don't see just storage and piled materials. I see myself in these places; I feel belonging; it is a familiar environment. I recognise the smells and the sounds, shapes, and forms that become memory triggers.

But something is different with me now, and the way I see and feel when around these places is not just the feeling of nostalgia; it is something more; it is to see forms, space, and colours in a way I had never seen before.

When looking at a pile of reinforcing steel net used to support concrete walls or ceilings, I became amazed by the effect created by the way it was piled up. (image29;30) This massive steel pallet allowed the light to come through, which made it somehow light and fragile, and I felt the need to do something about this; I wanted to get all the pallet of reinforcing steel net, and show it around and create something with it, but to buy this amount of material it was just unrealistic now. I needed now to figure out how can I work with steel-net considering my working space and budget limitations.

After working with the computer program SketchUp to help me understand shapes and sizes, I finally started to visualise possible ways of using the steel net. These steel nets are 240x120cm with 3,5mm thickness with squares of 10x10cm. I understood that if I cut these

squares individually and then piled them up in one single column, I could recreate the effect seen on the pallets and that just one of these nets would give me a column around 40cm high. Now with the base in a shape of a puzzle piece in concrete and the steel net column and in an almost natural way, the image of the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns came to me, and it was something that I could explore.



Image27- Rusted screws. These screws were reused hundreds of times in different projects.



Image28- Example of wood casting moulds and the deterioration from the extreme amount of use.



Image29 and 30- Steel and wood piled and stored in a construction materials store.

These images directed me to create a top ornament (capital) on the column using the same casting mould used to create the base module with the same puzzle shape. This way, I save materials, but I also make the possibility to reproduce various similar columns that can become attached at the base and the top in a similar way, allowing me to create a single structure that can be assembled in many ways.

On the top and supporting the capital, it is what I call the neck with 20x15x15cm made of concrete to allow a central solid steel rod with 150cm long by 22mm radius that is the spine and supports the column, and that is also imbued on a similar concrete shape with 40x15x15cm at the bottom and placed inside of the foot (base) module with the same puzzle shape as the capital.

Involving the “spine” are the individual cut squares of the steel net, piled up in one row and having around 90cm high between the two concrete modules that support the steel rod.

The top with the open space and columns is the element connected to the contemporary ruins, with the abandonment of unfinished buildings or the still in construction structures. It can be the head, a private area, a place of reflection, a place where memories are vanishing or being created; it can also be the Corinthian capital with ornaments inspired by mysterious findings that carry their own stories.

Naturally, the way the work was taking shape, it started to look very architectonic related. It felt like it could take us to a scale module for a monument with enormous dimensions, and here I got a little worried.

I first created sketches of a massive block of columns all attached and where the viewer would go around it, and that could see through the steel body of the column and on the top could see this forest of columns. And the feeling was there, it felt like a scale model, so I decided to use the metamorphic characteristics of the work and try a different display.

I felt that I should allow the viewer to come inside the work, allowing it to be interactive. From here came the U shape. It did not feel like a scale module anymore because it had become something else; now, we can go inside it and have a private experience and see the details. But it is also a see-through work, there is transparency, so when someone is on the inside, it can be observed by someone outside. This may create a performative piece because the person on the inside has become an interactive element of the work for the outside observer.

These observations and the U shape idea were only possible when the work was halfway through the building process.

Another essential characteristic of this work is the materials chosen to work with, concrete and steel; the strange elements added to it like the acrylics, found objects, paint and drawings. The acrylics are present because of my will to have something different and some colour because an abandoned building or construction is not just concrete and steel. It has the constant presence of tags and graffiti, abandoned objects or nature taking over the spaces. The paint is to create this in-between environment. Is it being painted? or is it decaying? But these elements are also a mystery to me because adding some features without a clear purpose allows this work to have something new; it all depends on my perception of the moment.

Some of the found elements in this piece come from a building about to go down not far away from KHiO. (image5) The Grüner sports club from Grünerlokka, where I went with an artist friend to explore the space and improvise an intervention/installation with objects found inside the rooms. We took some photos and videos and took a few things that are now part of the piece.

It is a place that would not have any significance to me. Now it will be part of my personal history, and that also will be remembered and become part of a conversation because I brought with me a piece of concrete attached to a steel chicken net and a few handles from the doors.

This will probably allow me to learn more about this space and the people who used the area; it is an exciting idea. I did not find much information about this building; it is more about the club. But for some reason, I was also confronted with the feeling that maybe I do not need to know everything about this building and that just to have taken and placed these objects in my work will at some point attract stories about this place to me, because I will also be more sensitive to anything or anyone that brings this building to the surface.

Conclusion

While the construction of this work, I almost forgot the initial thoughts about the house where I lived as a child; that place that should be the story behind this project, and now, in the end, suddenly I see it there, it is the unfinished place that I was ashamed of, but that also was protective, and this time with an invitation to come inside.

Undertaking this project helped me strengthen my confidence in the decisions, the steps taken and in seeing things as part of a continuous and endless process.

Nothing is finished, and nothing is limited to one direction. Things evolve, creating the possibility that what today seems the way to go may change and take alternative routes in the future.

My creations should reflect the intensity with which I live and enjoy what I am doing, simultaneously, a way of learning and applying knowledge and experience.

I also learned with this work that the work of art is also created for me to enjoy and be intrigued by.

But in the end, the most important is that it has been helping me to make peace with past experiences; it became a healing process that allowed me to use and transform memories of personal difficult times into creativity and understand that together with these difficulties, there were also moments of joy and happiness.



Detail- "A place for unfinished memories"



Detail- "A place for unfinished memories"



Detail- "A place for unfinished memories"



Top view- "A place for unfinished memories"



Detail- "A place for unfinished memories"



Detail- "A place for unfinished memories"



Eye view- "A place for unfinished memories"



Title- *A place for unfinished memories.*

Year -2022

Material/technique- Sculpture in concrete, steel, found objects, used objects, reused materials.

Size- 180x142x228cm

Readings

- RUINS, Documents of Contemporary Art, edited by Brian Dillon; Co-published by Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press. First published, 2011.
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- FLIGHTS, by Olga Tokarczuk, Publisher Penguin Putnam Inc, Imprint Riverhead Books, U.S, 2020.
- THE POETICS OF SPACE, by Gaston Bachelard, Publisher Penguin Books LtdImprint Penguin Classics, Publication, London, United Kingdom, 2014.

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ⁱ RUINS, Documents of Contemporary Art, edited by Brian Dillon; Co-published by Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press.
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