

Tribeless

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*When the damn thing breaks
I'll be there to take your pulse*

*In the cracks of our skin
There's a memory of a dove
When the dusk dissipates
I'll grow patient like atoll
Heavy, the boulder
Resting on the blade
Swing low, sweet seesaw
Right above your rib-cage
Bodies of water
I could book it dancer
Dance on the air
And then input in prayers*

*When the damn thing breaks
I'll be there to take you home*

- Nai Palm, Atoll¹

¹ *Atoll* is a track on *Needle Paw*, the first solo project of Nai Palm, an Australian artist-musician. During a 2017 play-session / interview discussing the album release, she stated the need of making something “*naked and imperfect for herself*” and outlines; “*I’m not a metal guitarist, even if my guitar looks kinda metal*”.

Throughout the interview, Nai stands holding her instrument, named *Michael Jackson*, which she tunes continuously as the interviewer faces her with questions about her life, career and the processes leading to the release of *Needle Paw*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDpdaUG5vjE> (Accessed 05.02.23)

I started my master study in Oslo in August 2021. Since then, I have spent one semester at Oslo National Academy of Arts, and two semesters visiting other academies; spring 2022 at the Royal Academy of Arts in Antwerp, Belgium, and fall 2022 at Uniarts in Helsinki, Finland. I'm writing this text again in Norway, during the months leading to my final exam. This text is about the ways in which things can transcend, and how craft can be utilized in the process. I would like to invite you to join me in thinking about words, and to consider their meanings in relation to how I work as an artist with a material tendency.

I want to prepare you for this task by reminding that the time of my study has situated itself in the aftermath of the lockdown periods following a global pandemic², and during it; nationalistic conflicts have escalated, and open war has returned to European soil³, contemporary Artificial Intelligence technologies⁴ have exploded our digital realms and 'Everything Everywhere All at Once' reached one of the highest-grossing successes of indie film.⁵

² <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/Koronasituasjonen/tidslinje-koronaviruset/id2692402/> (Accessed 15.02.2023)

³ On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The currently ongoing military conflict is an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which has been going on since 2014.

<https://yle.fi/a/3-12314941> (Accessed 15.02.2023)

<https://yle.fi/a/74-20010573> (Accessed 15.02.2023)

⁴The field of Artificial Intelligence research was founded as an academic discipline in 1956. The contemporary advancements of the digital algorithm technology, presented to us through the work of organizations such as LAION, has evoked a noticeable reaction and brought the topic into wider popular discussion.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-generative-ai> (Accessed 15.02.2023)

<https://laion.ai/projects/> (Accessed 30.01.2023)

⁵ The film, directed by Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert was shot in just 38 days between January and March 2020, at the onset of the Covid pandemic. It had a budget of just over \$14 million and a team of no more than nine people working on the countless digital effects – two of whom were the directors, who had not previously done anything similar.

https://english.elpais.com/culture/2023-01-26/everything-everywhere-all-at-once-the-indie-film-that-could-sweep-the-oscars.html#?prm=copy_link (Accessed 30.01.23)

The film brushes onto topics such as existentialism, technology, over-generational trauma, translation, absurdism, and identity in a kaleidoscopic multiverse. At this moment, I understand it as a journey in mastering a craft and doing the best you can in situations you find yourself in.

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This work is negotiation – Circumstances of artistry

I like to think of myself as a nomad. I am 27 years old, and all my personal belongings can fit into a single backpack. I have never in my life purchased furniture or kitchen utensils, and I would need at least triple the amount of fingers to calculate how many times I have relocated. There is a plethora of reasons why things are like this, but what is important, is that I do not get attached very easily, and that I have a strong inner compass which I usually trust over external guide signs. Just as I am the anchor of my practice, making art - regardless of the medium - has been one of the constants of my universe.

The auratic ecstasy one often finds on the tongues of makers is insignificant to my practice's existence. I do occasionally experience apparitions when engaging in craft, like every other human does – but it never lasts. Art, to me, is more of a creative response-ability. Art is what I choose to do in situations where any other reaction would cost a prolonged continuation of the insufferable status quo.

Reacting to problems as they arise is fundamental in sustaining progression; one of the main reasons I decided to pursue this degree was to fix some bugs I was experiencing in my work. I often found that after becoming finished, artwork becomes a half-forgotten object for passive observation and is mostly interesting to other artists in reference to their own production. I set a goal of figuring out how to breathe life into the efforts I am making and to find ways of incorporating my work into the active everyday life. Jussi Kivi, the recipient of the 2022 State Award of Visual Arts, writes in his article about the role of art and artists in society: “One must first ask the right questions. In any case, it is better to demolish than continue building leaning towers.”⁶

My practice has always evolved on the terms of symbiotic relationships; first making visuals for my friends' projects, stapling posters around city streets in exchange for festival passes, then printing the plates of other artists who lacked the skill and knowledge to make their ideas materialize, and later assisting people in their efforts of making their body-sites better match their self-concept. Being a craftsperson by trade, hand-skill is not my art - even if without it, I would be crippled. Art is the subtle alchemy emerging from the mutation of matter. Understanding that media becomes the message only after things have happened, positions craft people in a place of power - provided one is courageous enough to play with the ingredients in cause and effect. Applying stochastic⁷ to the eco-systems I am a part of is the main activity I've been engaging in throughout my study.

Looking back, I am happy to find myself in a place where my practice feels lighter to carry, and most importantly, true to how I am. More than the education path I have somehow kept an eye on, the questions I should keep chasing in the future have revealed

⁶ <https://www.taike.fi/fi/artikkelit/taiteilijan-tyon-suurin-haaste-ollut-sailyttaa-tyyneys-ja-motivaatio-taistelukentalla> (Accessed 30.1.23)

⁷ Stochastic is a term which Oxford Languages defines as ‘having a random probability distribution or pattern that may be analyzed statistically but may not be predicted precisely.’ In technical printmaking, a stochastic raster can be applied to halftone images; the main reason is usually preventing moiré or other unwanted errors which could arise from visible systematic misalignments.

I could state that multiple artists have successfully exercised their master printers in allowing the moiré effect to become key in some of their printed works. Even if I hold knowledge on these types of prints, it would be pretentious to claim that this reference has had a direct impact on my practice. Some things are meteors, others more like satellites.

themselves in places outside of the three schooling institutions that have periodically checked in on my progress.

Before we can get to the artistic section of my thesis, some environments need to be trespassed. To ensure a successful journey, the chosen tools and approach should first be inspected.

A Hungry Devil – On transparency issues and hiding in plain sight

Print, in both its digital and analogue aspects, is unrivaled in its capacities of demonstrating the modulations within the webbings of reality. Always already⁸, its incognito state of being reminds me of the Genie of the lamp; taking the form of whichever vessel it temporarily occupies, it can alter the sites of reality, with friction often involved in the process. Most importantly, close attention must be paid to clearly stating the conditions of interactions – otherwise the results might not match what was expected to happen. Luckily, one gets multiple tries.

Historically, print is the mechanistic function of communications, inhabiting the sensuous contact points between operators. Moving onto the sphere of the Fine Arts, and understanding the auto-poetic logic of the apparatus of print is an academic milestone in itself, but it would be insulting to stop the exploration at the edges of white spaces where most ‘fine print’ has been kept locked in. Attending to print’s capacities of cultural production within the public realm demands systematic understanding, and willingness to recognize non-tangible operations – but also, taboos. Unwanted information is usually thinly recorded on the archives - critical writing on print is a young branch of artistic research, making investigations challenging from an academic perspective.

Add to this the fact that I am not just an artist-printmaker, trying to develop the field of craft as we know it. I am also a tattooer, and I am unsure of whether I am allowed to take part in the discussion. After all, I was not able to join dinner.⁹ The decision to sometimes ignore¹⁰ the usual steps towards ‘established artistry’ makes me out of sync, but change will not occur without change. Leaving the table has made it possible for me to expose myself to the surrounding world, bringing in exotic ingredients to be added into the mix.

⁸ Richard S Field. Listed a bunch of statements on his 1994 article "Sentences on printed art." I recognize ‘always already’ as a frustratingly exciting multi-parallel state of time which is obvious in the apparatus of print.

⁹ *Guess who’s coming to dinner?* is a series of public lectures, debates, arts talks and book presentations at the Royal Academy of Arts Antwerp. This series, like many other platforms that are intended as forums for meeting peers or disseminating and sharing professional knowledge and experiences in the field of arts and culture, is usually arranged to take place during times when I must be engaging with other urgent responsibilities, such as finding a place to live at, working or sitting in an airplane. Sometimes digital recordings of the talks will be available for later referral, which is helpful, but as we know, a print is not equal to the matrix.

¹⁰ *Guess who’s coming to dinner?* is a series of public lectures, debates, arts talks and book presentations at the Royal Academy of Arts Antwerp. The title of the series implies the assumption that the guest is joining a group of people who are already committed to attending. This series, like many other platforms that are intended as forums for meeting peers or disseminating and sharing professional knowledge and experiences in the field of arts and culture, is usually arranged to take place during times when I must be engaging with other urgent responsibilities, such as finding a place to live at, working or sitting in an airplane. Sometimes digital recordings of the talks will be available for later referral, which is very helpful, but as we know, a print is not equal to the matrix.

Since I fell into transdisciplinarity and started wearing the body arts badge next to my graphic one, I have been made aware of being an anomaly. I pay the price of being 'other'¹¹ in both printmaking and tattoo studios, and I often find myself feeling schizophrenic in my attempts to tend to the borders of knowledge nobody else seems to be bothered by. Attempts at lowering the curtains between these two realms are frustrating; some printmakers struggle even to legitimate screen-printing as 'fine print' - so, introducing pigment enveloped in skin as art-material is definitely out of question. Concurrently, some conservative tattooists insist on exclusively supporting 'real tattooing', pointing at people with a certain aesthetic style and social setting. The message from both sides is the same; 'You can't sit with us!' The situation leaves me with few allies to debate with.

However, times keep rolling, and here I am - a bastard between two fires¹².

11

Referring to negative comments I've first-hand received from some of my professors as a reaction to my ways of working with tattooing, but also, comments from my tattoo mentors and colleagues as a reaction to my ways of working with the academy.

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Artist-Printmaker William Kentridge characterized particular types of combinative artistic tactics as 'bastards' at his presentation in the 'Grafikkens stilling' Seminar at Oslo Nasjonalmuseet 20.06.2022.

A Finnish saying 'Kahden tulen välissä' (Between two fires) describes hesitation between uncomfortable or difficult situations, choices or responsibilities.



Left - Shame
 Screen-print
 54x40cm
 2021
 Edition of 7

Right - A Shrouded Devil
 Screen-print
 30x25cm
 2021
 Edition of 9

Maturing as an artist, to me, has meant developing a dual aptitude. The first obstacle to solve is legitimizing my craft(s) as art. Proving the identity of screen-printing in this context is easy, as the efforts of Pop artists help me ignore the moaning¹³. Tattooing, on

¹³ I visited the POP ART exhibition at S.M.A.K museum in Ghent during spring 2022. Inspecting Andy Warhol's 'Marilyn Monroe' series of screen-printed works was great fun from a schooled printmaker's perspective; the prints were presented proudly as relics of the art movement, and had obviously provocative contrasts, halo effects, misregistration and uneven color fields. These sorts of technical executions are in my experience often cringed at by printmakers who highly value traditionally conservative ideals.

the other hand, is not so easy to get away with. If finding supportive material on print is at times tricky, then the situation with tattooing is a fully opaque struggle.

Reliable papers needed in discussing tattooing-specific phenomena in the academia are mostly written by anthropologists, and the professionally recognized artists who use tattoo-related aesthetics in their work are usually not active professional tattooers.¹⁴ One relies their investigations on an abused archive; scattered news clippings, verbal history and whatnot – but I live the life so I sense there to be *something*, even if it cannot yet be found in textbooks.

Unlike other creative endeavors situated in between the grey area in between art and craft (ceramics, print, photography, fibre arts etc.), tattooing suffers from a partial social stigma and lacks in “serious” academic appreciation and discussion. For the time being, tattooing is not institutionally accepted as a part of the Art and Craft canon, even if it is one of the oldest forms of recorded human culture¹⁵ and is practiced in all corners of the globe.

The craft is unique in its sovereignty, continuously auditing itself within the communities and relationships it inhabits. Uncultivated soil allows for multiplicity to take place, but the open-roam freedom is a double-edged sword. It is difficult to establish quality labels, guarantee tattoo safety, or to unionize and demand institutional benefits such as artists’ grants or project development funding. Without my background, and my ability to converse through print, I think it would have been impossible for me to get selected to carry out a master’s degree in arts. Additionally, conceptualizing one’s way through the material and social obstacles in everyday tattoo shop life requires a specific type of masquerade to take place, as it is the patrons of the art (people getting tattooed) who grant the mandate for executing work. One must become a trickster - a wolf in sheep’s clothing, if inspected through the loupe of a history where the tattoo business has been consistently demonized by official authorities.

As a tattooer, you are committed to imprinting another person for the rest of their lives with your hand-work, including all the invisible things that arise during the frictious interactions. The events cannot be confined to the material world, but they cannot come to being without exercising stuff.

Later that spring, during a closed semester review, one of the marking professors said to me while squinting their eyes ‘It (the color combination of my work) hurts my eyes: I can’t judge (the concept in the work) something like this!’ followed by another one of them calling my thinking ‘bullshit’.

¹⁴Defining ‘professional’ in the field of tattooing is a pain; regardless of the multiple attempts of full-time-tattooer-led organizations such as NTU – Norwegian Tattoo Union, no satisfactory legislation or other official guidelines has been established for practicing the craft. The wild-west-like attitude has brought us to a situation where anyone can get their hands on equipment and take on the role of a ‘tattooer’ - in worst case scenarios, people work under the disguise of ‘a conceptual, artistic approach’ without proper technical training and in unapproved, unsanitary conditions, placing themselves and the people they are tattooing under a serious health risk. In street-shop lingo, these careless types of unserious practitioners chasing for a quick buck or social clout are sometimes referred to as *scratchers*.

The problem becomes more nuanced after we admit that there are multiple seasoned tattooers who have turned to working from exclusively private studios and provide excellent quality service and safe application, but which is arguably very conceptual and experimental in nature. These individuals often choose to stay under radar with limited public presence and availability.

As things are now, there really is no reliable way for people to separate the wheat from the chaff – usually the realization comes when it’s already too late.

¹⁵ “This (finding of Ötzi the Iceman’s tattoos) demonstrates to me that the desire to adorn and heal the body with tattoo is a very ancient part of our human past and culture.”

A 2015 online article published by the Smithsonian confirming that the oldest tattoos on humans date back to 3250 BCE <https://www.si.edu/stories/ancient-ink-iceman-otzi-has-worlds-oldest-tattoos> [Accessed 12 January 2023].

What makes the craft-objects of tattooing unique, is their absolute temporality. Being organic tissue, tattoos go through a metamorphosis of 'fresh-healed-settled-aged'. The idea of a defined, finished work is inherently impossible, because it never exists. Parallel to what's happening in, through, and around skin, the work adapts accordingly. And at some point, we die. This is where one could give up, but print always comes rushing in, helpful as ever with its endless vessel-dwelling magic.

From my perspective, print is all over tattooing. Historically, they have direct practical, technological, material, theoretical and philosophical connections and both could be argued to represent the same trade of culture production. For example, in mid-eighteenth-century Japan, before a major shift in state religion made it prohibited, popular tattoo (irezumi) artists were traditionally first trained as ukiyo-e (woodblock print) artists before learning to handle needles and skin. One can learn from the older generation of tattooists that the Japanese think-speak of tattooing as 'engraving on skin'¹⁶. In Europe, traditional tribal body art practices were banned by the State-Church as barbaric mutilation of the 'perfect body'¹⁷. However, the rule did not apply on crusade soldiers whose bodies would be marked with religious symbols, to act as a permanent record of belonging to an identity and ensuring a Christian burial if one was to fall in battle.

The first electric coil tattoo machines, known as "tattaographs" were patented in 1891 in the USA by Samuel O'reilly based on Thomas Edison's designs for stencil machines used by sign-painters, not to mention Lew Alberts, a former wallpaper designer who initiated the global circulative business of flash¹⁸, based on reproducing image design sheets and hand-carved stencil¹⁹ matrices used in making image transfers on skin from the archives systematically exhibited on studio walls.

¹⁶ I am convinced that I have heard my mentors and colleagues say this many times.

¹⁷ In 17th century Åland, the State-Church would follow the teachings spread from the monasteries in mainland Europe and encourage small village communities to look for 'impurities' amongst themselves. Witch trials would be arranged for people who were alleged to be engaging in forbidden witchcraft activities, which were originally native to the ways of the people inhabiting the Islands. Alongside confessions following torture, one of the ways of proving guilt was to look for 'suspicious' traces on the skins of the accused. Bruises, stigmas, or any other unspecified 'black markings' would be used as evidence to justify anathema, which would lead to the individuals leading a life in exile. During those times, banishing a person from their community often meant early death.

Virtanen Leena. 2013. *Noitanaisen Älä Anna Elää : Tosikertomus Noitavainosta Suomessa 1666-1671*. Helsinki: WSOY

¹⁸ Flash could be described as the main archive of tattooing. Historically it means ready-to-go motifs presented at shop walls or binders, meant to give walk-in clients inspiration or to be executed directly as is. In American Traditional tattooing, they are based on the drawings of the first professional tattooers in 19th century USA, and they are specifically meant for mass production. A shift in expectations of originality can be traced back to the 1970's, when the idea of tattooing custom-made designs for just one time started forming. Today, flash can be found in all different kinds of styles and usually refers to pre-drawn designs usually meant for single applications. Clients should consult further specific conditions of reproduction of designs with each individual artist.

The common consensus amongst tattoo artists seems to be that 'universal or traditional' designs are encouraged to be used by all, but particular, identifiable designs should not be 'stolen' from their makers.

¹⁹ A stencil is the matrix used to register a design blueprint or a sketch onto the desired spot on the soon-to-be tattooed person's skin. Historically stencils have taken the forms of hand-carved wooden blocks, felt pads or plastic acetate sheets. Today, they are usually applied by the use of hectographic skin on a paper carrier.

<https://www.tattooarchive.com/history/stencils.php> [Accessed 9 January 2023]



Genistreker Tattoo in Bergen, Norway. Flash by different artists is presented in folders, on the walls, and on the ceiling,

Printmaking has also sprouted through a turbulent climate, filled with governmental bans, political resistance, and underdog deviance²⁰. There is a clear divide in the eras of before and after the act of marking present in both crafts. Admitting the bridges between these radical fields, returning from my adventure, and setting camp on the turf of craftsmen-artists is hopefully safe to make with a printed warrant at hand.

The second important thing to solve after figuring out my homelessness, has been recognizing which things I can and should take on as artistic responsibilities. An awkward maneuver to pull off in a world which is literally burning in all kinds of urgent ways, especially while bearing the inherited burden of failure mindset²¹ and simultaneously holding a protective veil over the private parts of my practice.²²

Sieving the flow of sensuous material, skin, ink and paper, I have focused my efforts on identifying the potential in things that appeared and desperately haunt me. Things that I feel necessary to introduce to the shared field of vision and which could – hopefully - lead to processes that people might not at once want to experience, but which might become improvements.

“Design has never been about giving someone or some group what they ask for but what they wish they had asked for and retrospectively pretend that they did ask for it.”²³ This also applies to my work - administrating social friction is at the core of my artistic strategy. Getting to the problem calls for applying the anesthetic qualities of ‘good’ design, and making objects which seem like they were always there. In traditional tattooing, this idea manifests

²⁰To a person like me, this is obvious. In Finnish, we say some things are suckled in as a baby – one learns from their environments so naturally and seamlessly that the results of the interaction should almost be taken for granted. I visited ‘Werbepause - The Art of Subvertising’; a collective exhibition in Berlin during summer 2022, hosted by Kunstraum Kreuzberg. The show focused on both historical and contemporary tactics artists are using in their efforts of empowerment, resistance and education. I picked up two stickers from that show, which had an image of a bear and a text – Werbung? NÖ. No signatures, just a basket on a table. I have no idea who made them because the maker chose to remain anonymous.

I glued one of the stickers on a public bathroom, next to a sticker I made myself before I started my MFA, and the other to my portfolio case which I use for storing commercial work. Next to it, there is a sticker for my German friend’s screen-printing (business), and one that I got from Uniarts (business).

²¹ I met with artist-researcher Mia Mäkelä at her home-studio during Konstrundan in Helsinki, September 2022. Mia shared parts of her practice with me and told me that the biggest difference she sees when comparing the times when she was a young artist and now, is the ever-looming failure mindset that is imposed upon the younger generation when discussing global crises. She had found during her most recent research project that the Baltic Sea, which is currently the most polluted body of water in the world and is so eutrophicated that it is understood as beyond salvageable by scientists, had once been a sweet-water lake. There is excitement in the possibility of the sea returning to another state of being and regaining its health in an unexpected way.

I suspect her project with the Baltic Sea will be published at some point on her website;

<https://www.miamakela.net/art-projects-expeditions>

²² I am being evasive on purpose on this part of my text. Words have a literal defining power, which can be destructive towards the things one finds sensitive or worth protecting. I simply do not feel comfortable with exhibiting the entirety of my work and its roots in public spaces.

Nonetheless, keeping silent is a luxury we cannot afford. Choosing to act upon responsibilities rather than hiding mute behind our privileges would not lead to anything.

This is why I am not only a writer, but also a craftsperson. Art helps us avoid the fate of Icaros.

²³ Colomina and Wigley. *Are We Human? : Notes on an Archaeology of Design*.

as 'finding oneself on the wall'²⁴. There is no single explanation to why some ideas ripple through one being to another, but in the context of consensual tattooing²⁵, understanding the reasons to our commitments are found in the word 'intention.'

²⁴ Lal Hardy talks about the positive social history of tattooing and describes recognizing 'good' designs by seeing people look at flash on studio walls and at once say *Wow - I want that on me!* Most successful tattooing affirms the individual in feeling that their appearance supports their idea of themselves.

Bastian. *Tattoo Tales*.

²⁵ All forms of craft have occasionally been weaponized to serve socio-political violations, where extreme acts of dehumanization have been carried out in order to break down the sense of self. Just like printed propaganda pamphlets aim to warp common mindsets and norms, by altering the body, one alters the concept of the very individual it belongs to. On the constructive end of the spectrum, craft can be carried out to fulfill its radical potential for empowering, rebuilding and claiming authorship.

Santibañez. *Could this be magic? Tattooing As Liberation Work*.



Shadows
Hardground etching on paper
24x20cm
Edition of 6
2021



A healing tattoo made by request for an American traveler.
The tattoo is on inner forearm, applied during summer 2022. I do not know why this specific image sparked an urge for the person to inscribe the motif onto themselves. To me the horned character represents the struggle of existing in dissonance with oneself and the need of fleeing from the gaze of others, but the intention of the tattoo is not in my hands. As an artist I find comfort in knowing ideas can ripple through me, making an impact to be carried out to the world.

Material^x

Being mathematics, processes do not require specific materiality to exist. Aligning in essence with the definitions of laws of nature, the purpose of them is explaining how stuff *works*. They are formulas. Negotiating with them is comforting, as they do not demand living up to the sensitivities attached to social norms in the same way as working with humanities does.

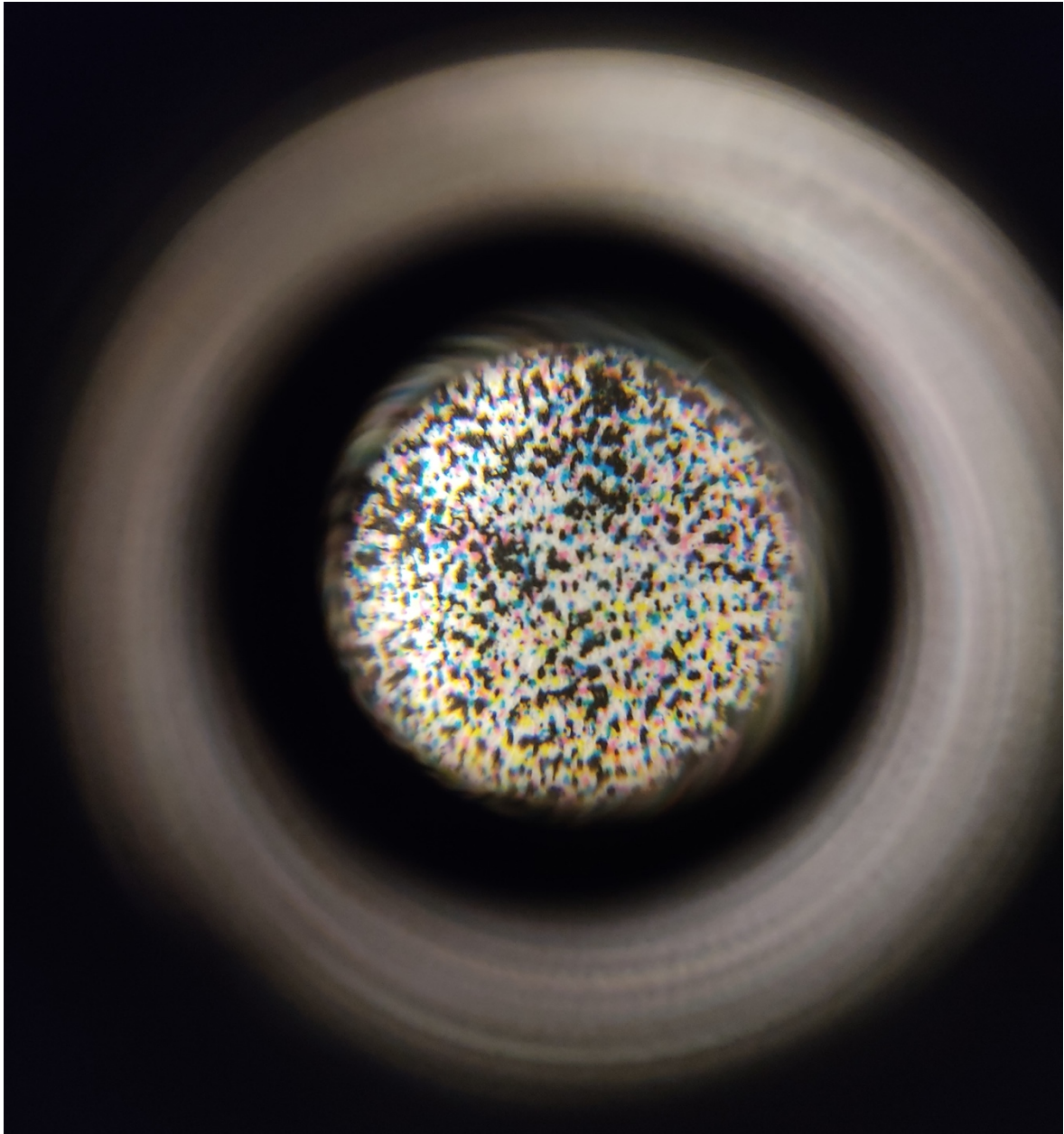
Codices are without mandates or authoritative ideologies, and ultimately, they cannot be imposed with universal meaning. A spray-painted rainbow, for example, through its cultural context can become a symbolic gesture with all sorts of elusive dimensions, but ‘a rainbow’, as Oxford Languages defines it, is “an arch of colors visible in the sky, caused by the refraction and dispersion of the sun's light by rain or other water droplets in the atmosphere”, not a statement. It is, very simply, the way things are.

My favorite formula is the standard CMYK. The four-color image separation system is a map of coordinates, consisting of individual pixel clusters, and a color palette designed to mimic the experience of visible light (RGB). Pixels are made by imposing decided amounts of negative spaces with cyan, magenta, yellow or key (option of black) ink, which then are registered in space in a configuration which our brain may or may not recognize as an image. By switching out the positions of the CMYK units, we can control which kind of output the system supports or does not support. An illusion of any shade or image can be achieved through different combinations.

A demonstration of reality; one could devote their life to coaching ceremonial military drill teams, where unison groups march with flags in precise synchronized patterns, which, if observed from a distance, will appear as seamlessly flowing formations. The successful choreographer would obviously be celebrated as a dance specialist, even if most of their time – in practice – is used towards figuring out things like which supplements best support the marchers’ performance. Pills, protocol and footwork are interconnected on the mind map.

Engaging with a kaleidoscope is utterly confusing, but all you must do is nominate the X. Remember - you are blind. Let’s return to the start of the rainbow. It is essential to understand that a visual CMYK rendering that reminds us of a rainbow is not just a mirage of a mirage, but a placeholder which succeeds in fulfilling the minimum visual criteria we have set for a phenomenon titled ‘rainbow’. If the pixel clusters do not meet our requirements for the idea - or any other familiar memory one might possess – we conceptually enter an area understood as abstraction in the world of visual communications. From a material viewpoint, all this is irrelevant. Regardless of their agenda, the inky units remain as blobs of pigment and binder laying on a fiber surface.

This is the intersection of art and craft.



Still from a video work
Total length [05:00]
2021

The film exposes the individual stochastic raster dots that make up a CMYK screen-print. The x86 zoom-in of the macro construction shows the tiny particles that together make up an illusion of another presence on the paper. By displacing the optic perspective, the plastic artificiality of the exterior is revealed – the image is a system.

Crafting questions

The Healey library describes primary sources²⁶ "immediate, first-hand accounts of a topic, from people who had a direct connection with it." This could mean anything from an object to a diary or a field recording. Secondary sources, on the other hand, "are one step removed from primary sources, though they often quote or otherwise use primary sources. They can cover the same topic but add a layer of interpretation and analysis." Attempts at organizing analysis and creation into teams are in vain, especially knowing that primary sources can also be secondary.

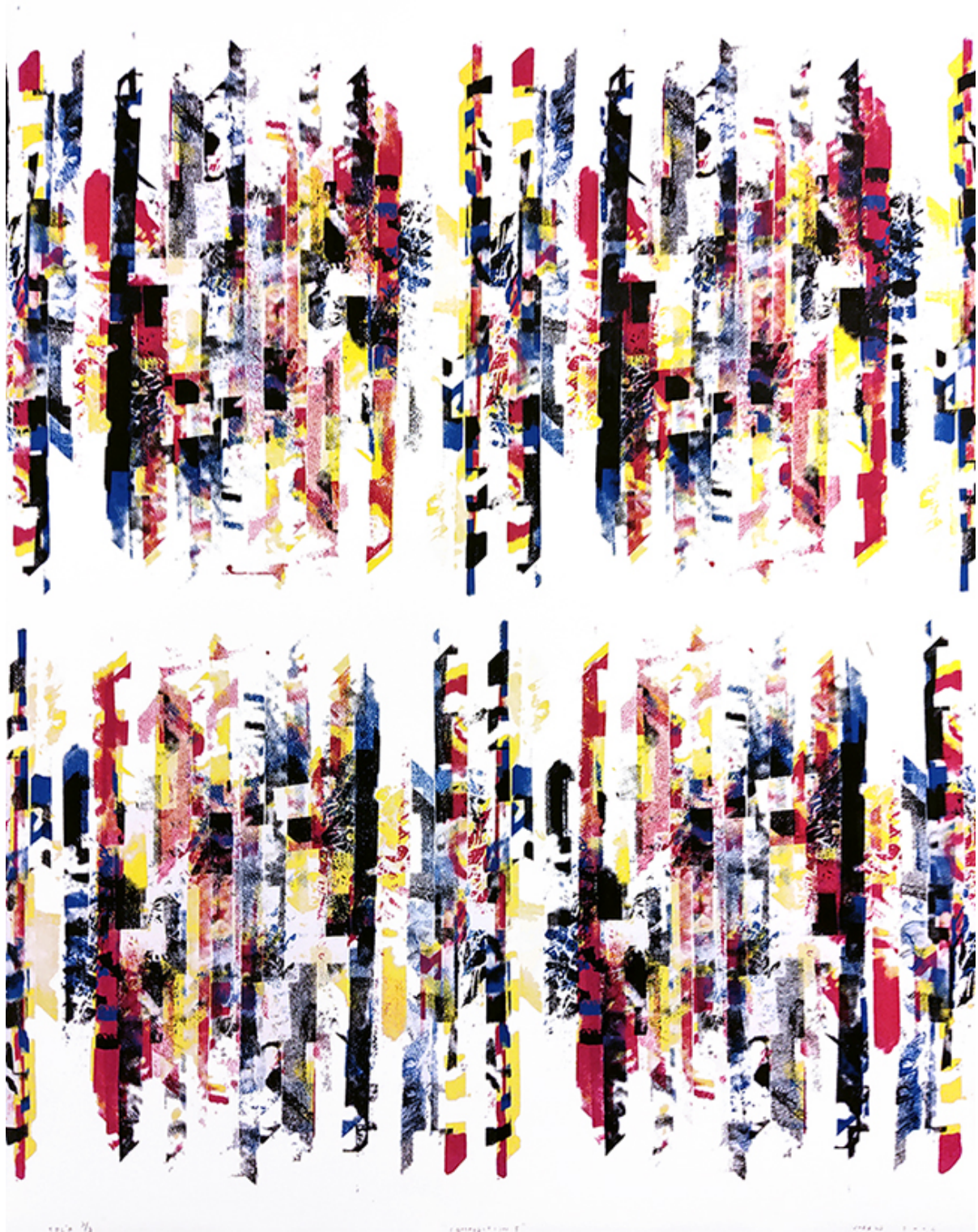
In any case, theses should arise from research – but there is nothing to research unless work is executed, and problematized. We find ourselves hitting a theoretical wall where something, everything and anything get all tangled and there really are no points to follow. Donna Haraway consoles; 'Everything is not connected to everything, but everything is connected to something. ' Not knowing where to go, but assured with the idea of sympoiesis²⁷, getting stuck in the weeds is something my craft can help with.

I spent the first four months of my masters stretching my attention, zooming in and out of technique, execution, and image, doubting what I was going after. Repeating some aesthetic pattern that had developed from a mix of involvement in visual arts, a habit of production and my surroundings in a prior point in life was a way of searching for meaning in what I was doing. The exterior did not matter; if I were someone else, it all would have looked different. I could make a thousand renderings of a motif and then be known as the person who is very occupied by certain characters. I started considering the irrelevancy of imagery and was left with process.

Time might be an ouroboros, with practice as tail and artist as jaw. Naturally, I would chew up my future.

²⁶ <https://umb.libguides.com/PrimarySources/secondary> (Accessed 31.1.23)

²⁷ Looking into what can be done to progress.



Construction I
Screen-print
107x78cm
2022
Edition of 3

Constructions

To make a screen-print, one needs to prepare a see-through binary positive with an impression of the information one wants to replicate. The carrier image is burned with ultraviolet rays onto a light-sensitive emulsion that is adhered onto a plastic mesh, which is tensioned firmly on a frame made of metal or wood. After exposure, all untouched emulsion is rinsed off, and after drying, the image is ready to be printed. If the positive is kept, it is possible to produce as many matrices as desired to print an infinite number of copies in infinite amounts of material combinations. The seeming range of opportunity is intoxicating, but the high wears down quickly.

Volume raises tolerance, different different but same. Regardless of whatever tricks the printmaker performs, the image does not change form if the source stays the same. This series of screen-printed works is carried out with the tactic of Divide and Conquer. My past, and the insides of my prior projects – photographs documenting the events of WW2 from the Finnish Defense Force archives, radiographs from the Oslo University medical archive, MRI-scans from the Children's Hospital in Helsinki, countless blanks, memory folders and echoes – each halftone dot offered together in the altar of possibility which is the CMYK.

I started the work by tearing up surplus positives from my earlier photomechanical projects done over the years I've been involved in printmaking. The shrapnel is then reorganized into new shapes and reprinted layer by layer in a single matrix process. I transferred the method of subtractive color printing into the realm of serigraphy, based on a duo-tone intaglio printing method; Colors are printed in rotation, with parts of the open mesh blocked with pieces of tape that are displaced between each layer. The tape functions as a plastic stencil, controlling which parts of the screen allow ink to pass through. Continuously repositioning the locations where ink and paper meet works great when printing with opaque solvent-based inks, which will only conceal the layers underneath if printed on top of each other.

Diving into the water-based world of acrylic printing inks, more possibilities are available. By adjusting the extender paste, consequently changing ink qualities such as opaqueness and viscosity, a variety of colorful results can be achieved from the overlays. In contrast to corresponding intaglio routines, colors can be superimposed indefinitely, as obstacles such as ink build-up, paper fibers stretching or shrinking, and plate wear-down do not hinder the printing process. Additionally, working through a single frame instead of the three to four traditionally used in CMY(K) printing introduces benefits such as preserving material resources and avoiding misregistration upon the silk-screen mesh stretching.



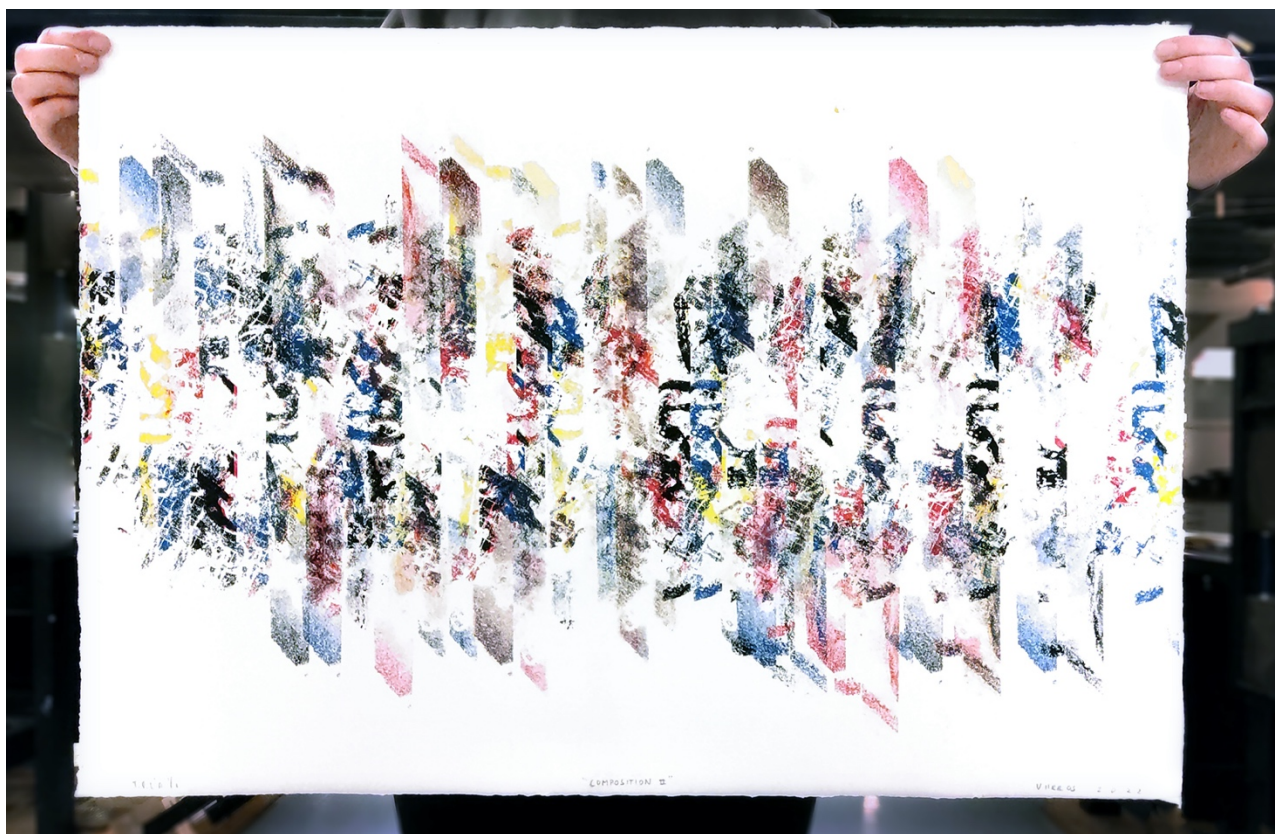
Remix (Yellow, Magenta, Cyan & Black)
Series of 4 deconstructed CMYK variation screen-prints
78x18cm each
Edition of 4 (E.V.)
2022



De/Construct
Screen-print
70x26cm
2021
Edition of 10



Re/Construct
Screen-print
75x110cm
2021
Edition of 3



Construction II
Screen-print
54x78cm
2022
Unique print

Destructing my practice was an act of liberation which came about as a reaction to finding myself ruttled in my work, and the external expectations for establishing a recognizable brand for my name. I was observing myself and my practice getting groomed to fit into an alien framework that didn't match with my actual life and interests.²⁸ There was a gap separating what I considered my 'private practice' and my 'professional practice'.

My private studio notes from the times I made these read;

black holes = rainbows.

There was opportunity, the work would change form with conscious effort. After I had worked through my own void and separated myself from the past, I applied the same process onto plastic positives I found discarded by other printmakers at the studios I visited. I wanted to see what could be formed off collective surplus.

Etiquette forbids one from taking copies of another artists' matrices or closed off editions - the act of canceling intaglio plates with deep X-shaped grooves is a good example of tactics used in fighting deflation and theft. The cross-mark is carved so that whoever might find the plate would know the proper way to treat it – do not touch. However, since the European Union has - after multiple postponements - set its deadline for climate neutrality to 2050²⁹, throwing usable material to waste should be considered an offense against the goal of lessening the damages of the climate catastrophe we are in the middle of. The Nordic Council of Ministers has released a vision, in which it states that the Nordic region is to be 'the world's most sustainable and integrated region in 2030.'³⁰ Sustainable development in this context stretches out to cover social, economic and ecological dimensions. In the light of current world events, screening for unviable patterns and mainstreaming ways of preventing them from propagating further is a responsibility that concerns the entire Nordic community and its collaboration partners.

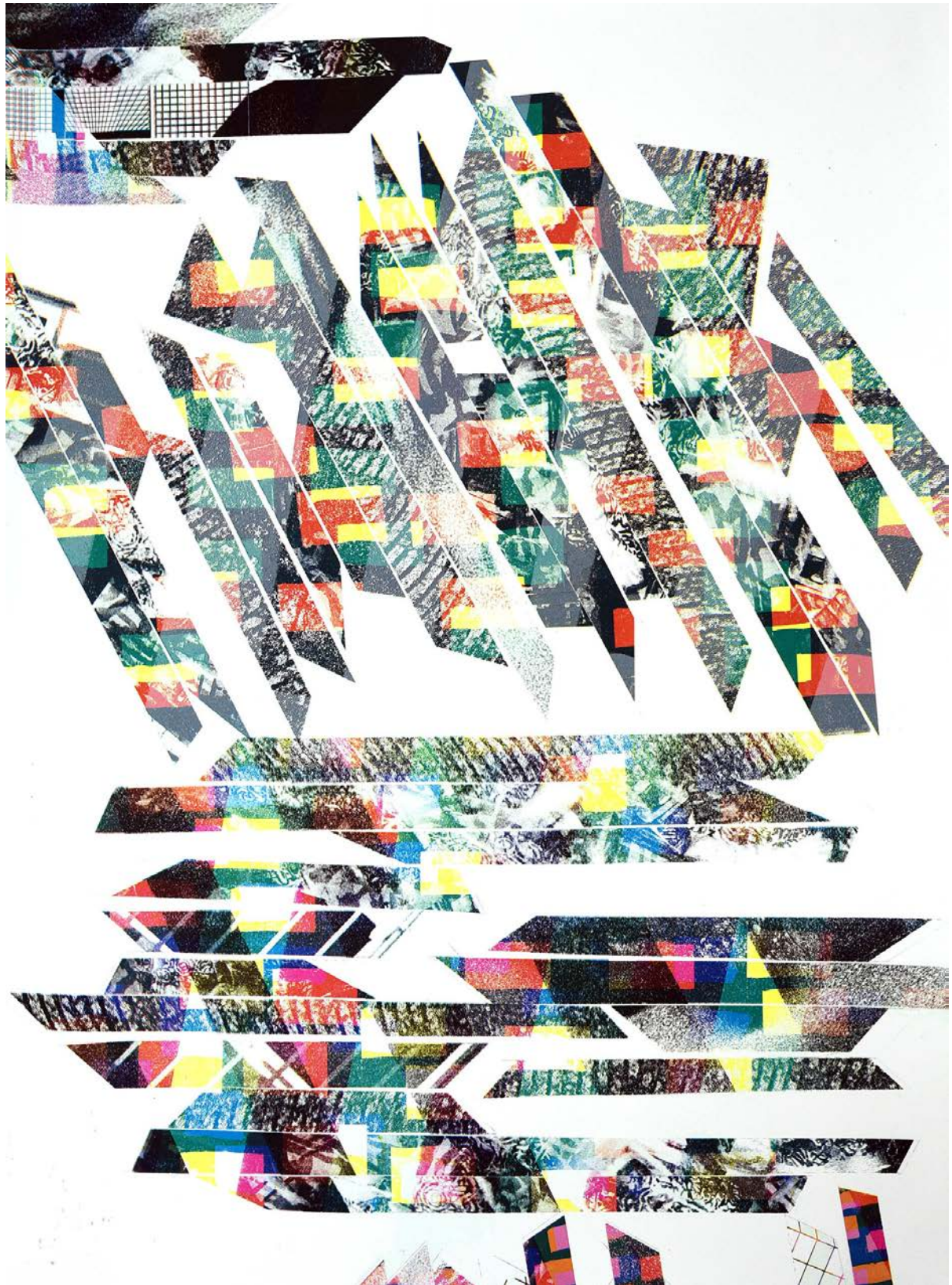
I argue that civil disobedience, such as dumpster diving, is an effective tool for realizing the Vision.

²⁸ At some point I found myself performing for the conservative art audience like a circus dog looking for treats, while at the same time working almost in secret for independent productions in subculture scenes. I have on multiple occasions been belittled by teaching staff; my work has been called "heavy metal nonsense" "unserious amateur hobby" or "passive secretary service", expressed in high pitched baby-talk voice, and it has been underlined how I will 'never be taken seriously by anyone if I don't start acting like an artist and stop wasting my potential'. In the saddest cases, I've submitted texts that included references or concepts which I have no connection or interest towards but were included because it was insisted by my professors.

Arts education programs are being developed increasingly towards project-based execution, where candidates are selected based on the texts they submit. This approach increases the risk of further homogenization of the arts industry, where only specific types of projects and people are chosen to be taken on, and there is little room for discovery, evolution or change of perspective.

²⁹ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/circular-economy-action-plan_en (Accessed 08.02.23)

³⁰ <https://pub.norden.org/politknord2020-719/#39212>



Vrije Grafiek I
Enhanced CMYK Screen-print
76x54cm
2022
Edition of 3



Vrije Grafiek II
Enhanced CMYK Screen-print
54x76cm
2022
Edition of 3

Follow the smoke

Some thirty years ago, things started to bounce around everywhere. The popularization of digital communication technologies irrevocably changed our routines of absorbing information. The daily portion of a fresh, inky newspaper has turned into an all-you-can-eat buffet, where the number of stimuli an individual can process is far less than what we can record and mediate as a collective. The task of navigating the super-packed media that allows us to stuff ourselves to a point of nausea is like climbing an iceberg, where the grit of one's social media literacy is put to test.

Algorithms help us digest the gruel, but there is a side effect if one is not mindful of the dosage. Numbly ingesting the dopamine-filled trends which promote selected key points might lead us to a laziness that gnaws our patience towards working out the details in understanding public discourses. The problem is especially obvious in cliqued social media platforms, where information is spread rapidly, and context collapse is at times exercised on purpose. Paranoid reading, no matter how indeliberate, is an engagement strategy where anything can be made into proof that supports one's selected truth.³¹ On the other side of the coin, capitalist marketing strategists are also inhaling tried and true virtue signaling, only that green has turned to pink. The fall through a world of mirrors continues as eco-washing warps into rainbow campaigns. It is difficult to criticize the unjust environmental and communal impacts stemming from Western overconsumption if their cause is directly tied to a seeming increase in human rights awareness.³²

To unravel, issues must be dissected. The Socratic Method is an academic tool intended to non-invasively support critical thinking. The method unfolds as a form of argumentative dialogue, in which open-ended questions are asked to help the participants develop their elasticity and tolerance for uncertainty when nearing the core of the topic. When orchestrating the conditions for interaction, we inevitably arrive at a place where we must question the relevancy of the operation strategy in relation to what one needs to reach.

Cutting into common soil, we discover that rapeseed colonies and weeds might not mingle well, but countless pollinators rely on wild fields for their existence - and without bees, there are no flowers³³. Moderate cultivation should be encouraged when tending to commercial media landscapes.

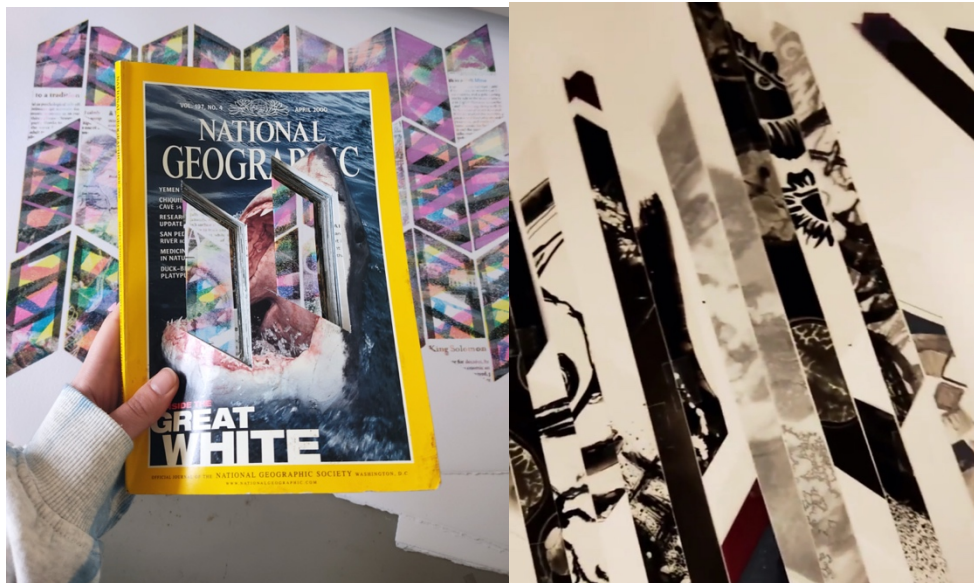
According to Osis' Media Literacy Index 2022, negative impacts of 'fake news' are most prominent in communities with externally controlled media, deficiencies in public education and overall lower trust in society. The European Union came up with its own definitions of disinformation and misinformation, where "Disinformation is false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain, and

³¹ <https://ylioppilaslehti.fi/2023/02/terveysia-narsissipenkista/> (Accessed 21.02.23)

³² <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-62597165> (Accessed 21.02.2023)

³³ The amount of flying pollinators is decreasing all over Europe. Up to 17% of the bumblebee species in Finland are endangered, and the amount of butterflies has been decreasing since 1990. In Germany, the decrease is up to 80% in the last 30 years.
<https://yle.fi/a/3-12528767> (Accessed 21.02.2023)

which may cause public harm. Misinformation is false or misleading content shared without harmful intent though the effects can be still harmful.”³⁴ Media freedom is found a key prerequisite for tackling misinformation³⁵, including in the context of safeguarding democracy. The biggest wave of exponential disinformation spreading since the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’³⁶ is the literal info-war³⁷, feeding off the escalated conflict between Russia and the West.



Process: Cutting into magazines, arranging shreds of silk-screen positives.

³⁴ https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/HowItStarted_MediaLiteracyIndex2022_ENG_.pdf (Accessed 15.02.2023)

³⁵ <https://www.nrk.no/nyheter/falske-nyheter-1.13438363> (Accessed 15.02.23)

³⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-tackling-%E2%80%98infodemic%E2%80%99-misinformation-and-cybercrime-covid-19> (Accessed 15.02.23)

³⁷ <https://www.apu.fi/artikkelit/suomenvenalaiset-kertovat-miksi-venajan-propaganda-uppoaa-kansaan> (Accessed 21.02.23)



Non See
 Enhanced CMYK Screen-print
 Based on cuttings of a National Geographic Magazine issue discussing: 'Sharks, Yemen, Chiquibul Cave, Research, San Pedro River, Nature's R, and Platypus'
 40+ layers of water-based ink.
 54x76cm
 2022
 Edition of 3

I don't know how these topics are connected, or why they happened to be curated into the issue. I stumbled upon the magazine by accident, chose to hold onto it because I found the image on the cover cool. The amount of color layers in the print was dictated by the amount of medium I had available – the printing stopped once there was no more medium left. The dense micro-archive in the magazine became material to keep myself occupied during a period when I had no stability outside the printmaking studio. I am unsure if this is a piece of art, an exercise in skill or evidence of a repetitive coping mechanism. Analyzing the work, I want to compare it to doom scrolling, or dancing in trance during a multiple day rave where each set bleeds into each other, and you are only reminded of human language when an odd out-of-context verbal line is mixed into the beat.



Tickets! Tickets! Tickets!
Screen-print
38x57cm
2022
Edition of 4

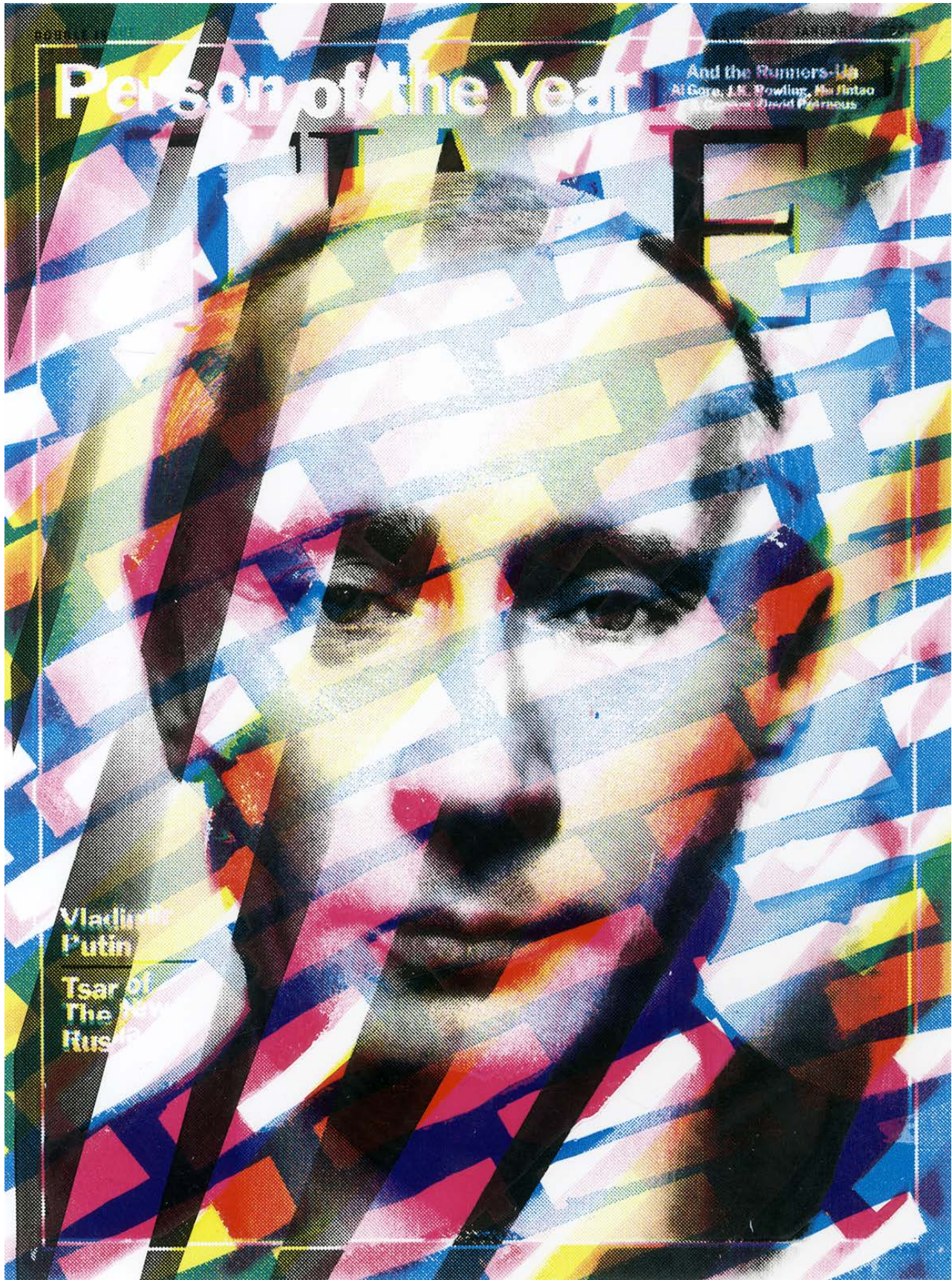
Based on shred up pieces of free-spread ephemera - event flyers, pamphlets and magazines collected from bars, universities, streets vendors and concert locales in Antwerp, Belgium.

After cutting everything with a scalpel, the contents are synthesized into the median average of local youth communications. Sales, festivals, schedules, internationalization, party, climate change, poverty, war, club.



Person of the Year
Two-sided silk-screen, CMYK
26x20cm (Original format of Time Magazine)
Edition of 112 (E.V.)
2022
Mediated as a part of the BOOK1 collective printmaking portfolio of Royal Academy Antwerpen

Reconstruction of Time Magazine's 2007 cover featuring Russian President Vladimir Putin - the new copy is a direct comment on image reproduction and the power of media in the live-feed social media sharing age, pointing the finger at the ever-fluent neo-referential information culture.



Person of the Year

And the Runners-Up
At Gore, J.K. Rowling, Hu Jintao
by Column David Peirous

Vladimir
Putin
Tzar of
The New
Russia

And the winners-
Up
Al Gore, J.K. Rowling, Hu Jintao
& General David Petraeus

Person of the Year

Person of the Year

A reconstruction of Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year' cover page from 2007, featuring Russian president Vladimir Putin.

The current political situation has irrevocably changed people's perspective towards the original, the printing process behind this new copy functions as a information flytrap, making the transformation of the cover's psychological significance visible, but also operates as a commentary on image building, both in its literal and ideological forms.

We are currently witnessing the renaissance of media dissemination. Understanding the power of (printed) media and how it is undeniably curated, and by whom, is more important than ever.

Printed by Maria Viirros in March 2022
at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts' screen printing
workshop in Antwerp,
in a varied edition of 112 two-sided prints.

You are holding the number / 112

Vladimir
Putin
Year of
The New
Russia



Double Issue

Enhanced CMYK screen-print

51x31cm

2022

A reconstruction of Time Magazine's 2022 'Person of the Year' cover, featuring Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Edition of 4

When letterpress printed newspapers were the main method of sharing information, one could tell there was bad news coming if the edges were printed with black.

We went from posting both false and true Covid-19 headlines to everything about the Ukrainian war, and now the season of AI is upon us. While the Western creative industry is raging over new technologies, and official contemporary artist unions are choosing to commercialize the work of their members in attempts to stay relevant in the media boom, there is still war on the European continent.

Time Magazine released their annual 'Person of the Year', featuring Zelenskyy as the 2022 cover portrait. I stole the image off the Internet, manipulated it, and printed out multiple copies that clearly look like the initial cover. Arguably, this image is generated with the use of a soulless printing machine, but it is hand-finished with an educated artist's touch, and it has both intense black and a lot of colors to cater to the fine tastes of art collectors.

Beneath the privileged debates, Europe remains in war, and societally we forget what freedom of the arts, mediation technologies or media literacy is connected to. While social media actors cry over stricter copyrighting laws, it is good to remember that the act of reproducing and sharing images should not be judged by some vague scale of 'respect to (commercial) origin.'

Art-work as a catalyst for change

Literary critic Stephen Burt describes the affect of poetry through a famous W.H. Auden quote; “Poetry makes nothing happen.” In a romantic scene, a highly focused reader is sunk in an armchair and collectedly immerses themselves in the caramel pages. Burt states; “It is our ability to imagine the hypothetical that makes poetry happen”³⁸. Surely, I think, the verses need to first land on a piece of paper the reader can hold onto before any comfortably seated magic can be conjured.

But now we’re moving too fast! Using the eyes on our backs, we realize it would be foolish to chase a dream of development and hold people accountable without considering the dilemma of pixels and synchronized marching. Having a designated reading spot should not be taken for granted. Resources help everything happen; Obviously, you might not prioritize attending lectures if you spend your nights freezing on a moldy mattress. This is no coincidence: how people exist, and to what extent they can exercise their capacities as members of society, be it academic, creative, or business-oriented pursuit, is controlled through agreements. Public sites are under a constant tug of war, where publicity and privacy are yanked around through maneuvers such as housing legislation, urban development, and vandalism. Actions ranging from individual to collective are implemented in curating situations that bind and separate different societal norms; who can be where, how long and at what cost. We have a vision, but if I type ‘housing crisis’ in a search bar, endless articles and chat threads describing the direness of our escalating situation pops up.

The 2022 World Inequality Report found North Africa and Middle East to be the most unequal regions in the world, while Europe dominates the top chart.³⁹ A 2022 Investment Monitor overview states that while northern European adults have become 50% richer in comparison to the 1990’s average, the wealth of their southern peers has been on steady decline.⁴⁰ A Swedish study shows accumulation in income differences within the nation, where 10,3% of citizens born outside the kingdom were living under the poverty line with only 1,5% of born natives.⁴¹ Simultaneously, Norwegian government is in the process of implementing a change in higher education tuition policies, in hopes of “freeing up to 2600 study positions” and “earning 900 million kroner” by collecting semester fees off non-EU citizens. Norway, which could be argued to be the richest nation in the world, intends on following the trend of exclusive political choices made in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, where the number of

³⁸ TED. *Stephen Burt: Why people need poetry.* (Accessed 20.04.22)

³⁹ <https://wir2022.wid.world/executive-summary/> (Accessed 23.02.23)

⁴⁰ <https://www.investmentmonitor.ai/features/inequality-within-europe-five-charts/> (Accessed 23.02.23)

⁴¹ <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/levnadsforhallanden/levnadsforhallanden/undersokningarna-av-levnadsforhallanden-ulf-silc/pong/statistiknyhet/undersokningarna-av-levnadsforhallanden-ulf-2021/> (Accessed 23.03.23)

students from the global south has declined up to 80% since similar legislation has been implemented.⁴²

I have been enrolled in programs within six educational institutions – counting only BA and MA levels – for free. I am ashamed to admit that even with all this, I feel incapable of putting out the flames.⁴³ What makes me furious is the fact that I am expected to tackle the problems of the world alone, while my colleagues are actively blocked from joining the task. When I overdose on cynicism, ironically, it is usually one of my well-traveled friends who holds my hair back while I sober up.

Both tattooing and printmaking have history as tools for protest and activism, where the media would take on the role of a carrier for statements. With their roots in working class populations, the crafts have been an irreplaceable part of political movements, responding to the world around them by spreading manifests, caricature drawings and signals of solidarity. Something must be done about the state of affairs, so being a printmaker, I started making posters.

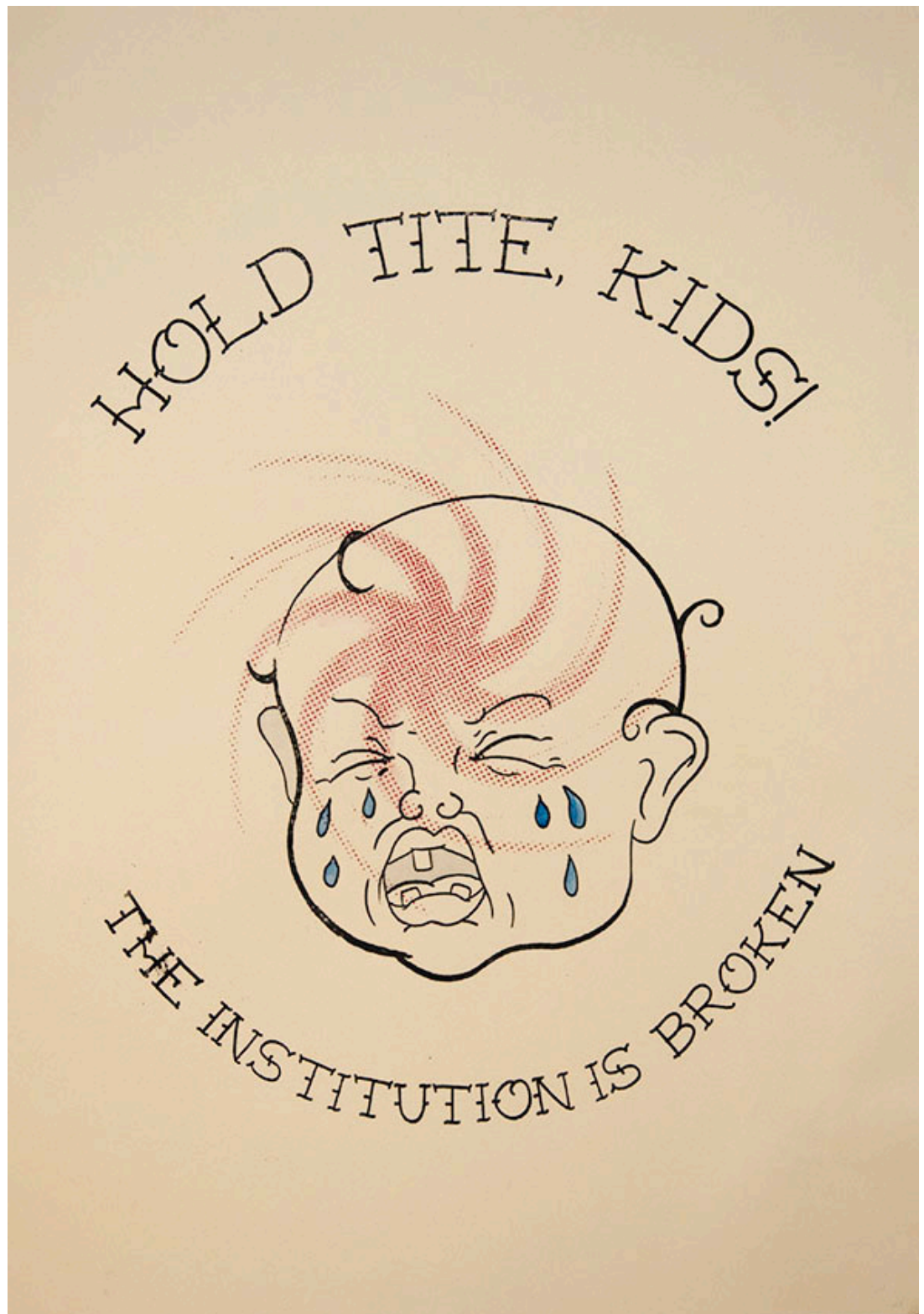
The symbolic images of American Traditional tattooing can be thought of as amulets. Flash can be selected as protection from vices or bad luck; for example, a tendency for gambling could be counteracted by tattooing a die set or a deck of cards. Favor in the dating life was manifested through seductive succubus figures or butterfly ladyfaces, flying from flower to flower. By enduring the pain of tattooing, the temptation would already be suffered, guiding the wearer, and reminding them to take decisions that support their goals.

⁴² <https://khrono.no/mener-universiteter-og-hogskoler-vil-tjene-900-millioner-pa-ny-studieavgift/723988> (Accessed 23.02.23)

⁴³ Sculpture on a Burning Planet is an open lecture series hosted by Uniarts Helsinki. The talks focus on the role of professional visual art field in a world of ongoing ecological catastrophe. During one of the discussions in fall 2022, I asked the lecturer - a supervisor for a PhD program at Aalto University - about how on earth they can justify a project that focuses on producing monolith ceramics decorated with images of endangered animals and shipping them all over Europe to be exhibited at contemporary art biennales, when every aspect of the practice depends on using a remarkable number of exclusive resources. The answer was cynical; "We cannot do a lot more than spread awareness. Besides, there is a lot of potential in the future generations, whom I teach daily. Somebody will surely come up with a practical solution. I mean - We cannot just stop the kilns."

The message was broadcast to a crowded audience of mostly Nordic students.

I sure wonder, if top professionals choose to keep their hands tied and focus on building their CV's, then who the hell has resources to make changes? (Citation from my private field notes)



Crybaby – After a flash painted by an unidentified tattooer in 1956

Screen-printed poster, watercolor, moirè

50x35cm

2023

The crybaby is a symbol intended to give its carrier strength and courage, and not let oneself be led by external forces



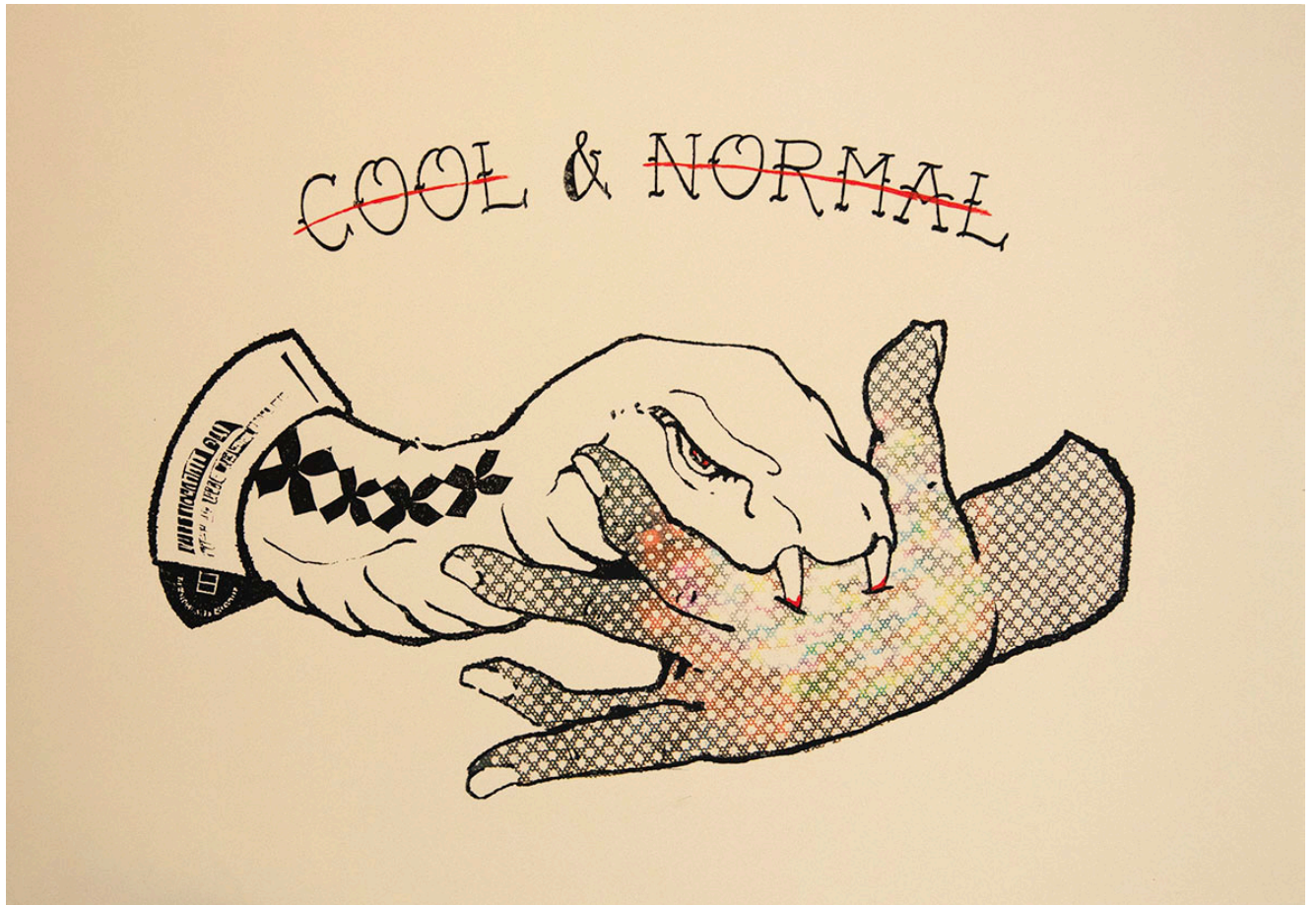
Get What You Get (Everyone gets the life they deserve) - After Shanghai Kate, Bert Grimm, Dainty Dotty, Sailor Jerry, Owen Jensen and Ed Hardy
 Screen-printed poster, watercolor
 35x60cm

2022

In tattoo shops that still hold onto the working-class roots of American Traditional tattooing, a possibility to get quick walk-in tattoos is offered. To cater to the needs of those who do not know or care about a preference, there might be a gumball vending machine labeled with 'Get what you get', sometimes with the subline 'Everyone gets the tattoo they deserve'. Instead of candy, it will be filled with pre-drawn designs. By inserting a coin and turning the handle, a plastic ball would roll out. Whatever flash it contained would then become your tattoo, no changes made.

In Norway, the activist group Reduser Husleia has been sharing the experiences of people who due to lack of funds or suffering from discrimination have no choice but to resort to illegal or hazardous housing in the unkept market. ⁴⁴The floor plan in the print is taken from a sales listing for a building marketed as a 'rental machine'. In the original blueprint, 23 rooms were offered for lease for 7500NOK per month each. There are 10 shared wet rooms, and no installed kitchens in the drawing. Having to let fate choose its course, the everyday nightmare for a lot of people has been turned into a monopoly board game. Human beings are reduced to nameless symbols whose reason for existence is to line the pockets of the owning class.

⁴⁴ https://www.instagram.com/min_drittleilighet/?hl=nb (Accessed 03.03.23)



Cool & Normal

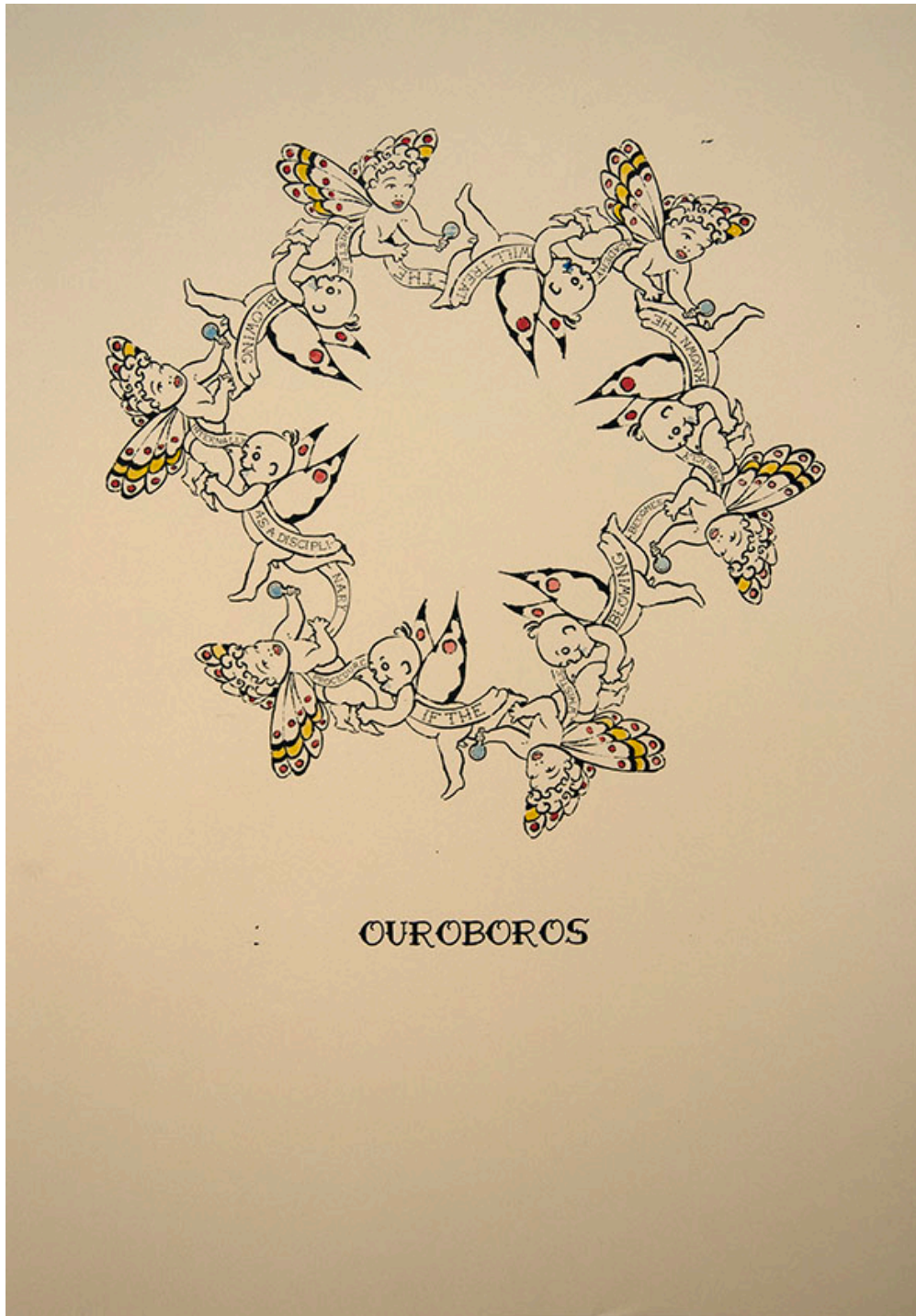
Screen-printed poster, watercolor

35x50cm

2022

The handshake snake is traditionally paired with the slogan 'Trust no one', which I switched out with a phrase one of my classmates would use when describing how authoritative institutions communicate destructive actions that are executed behind a everything-is-fine-nothing-to-see-here façade.

The patterns on the snake's scales and the collar are encrypted logos of Uniarts Helsinki, Oslo National Academy of Arts and Royal Academy Antwerpen.



Ouroboros – After Dainty Dotty and Lyle Tuttle
Screen-printed poster, watercolor
50x35cm
2023

The drooling butterfly cherubs are positioned in a carousel infinity loop, flying in an unchanging uniform pattern. The text in the banner is a citation from the official whistle-blowing procedure information at the webpage of the Oslo National Academy of Arts; "If the whistle-blowing becomes publicly known, --, the Academy will treat the whistle-blowing internally as a disciplinary procedure."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ <https://khio.no/en/intranet/for-students/speak-up-about-the-learning-environment>
(Accessed 07.01.2023)



All That Money

A3 Screen-printed faux gig posters combining extreme metal aesthetics and megastar Cardi B's hustle poetry

Edition of 200 (Additional 40AP + 15PP with golden signatures)

2022

Printed on donated surplus advert material

I learned while couch-surfing during spring 2022, that the average waiting time for designated student housing in Belgium is at a minimum of one year. While walking in downtown Antwerp, one could find countless office buildings for sale for extended periods of time, while most apartments would be rented immediately for sky-high prices. When discussing the situation, some of the people at the Academy would be shocked after discovering I could have trouble finding a place, and that I was residing on the North side of the city, "with all the creeps".

This poster is an emblem of the glossy facade, behind which exclusive market forces hide leeching off the dissonance between lived everyday reality, and the ubiquitous glorification of consumption.

*"Now give me all that money you've been stacking for your rent, n****"*

- Cardi B



Self-sites – Skin as a locus for social narrative

My universe does not have many permanent objects other than the body I inhabit. When I was volunteering for a booking agency, my team would spread new posters every two weeks, to replace the ones that were outdated, ripped off or lost to the elements. Galleries and museums tend to operate on rotation where new projects are installed in the shift of month. The issue with creating work on paper, whether it is shown at galleries or in the streets, is that it inevitably ends up disappearing. A study published by Montclair State University states that the average person spends around 10-27 seconds viewing artwork in museums, and that most of that time is used on taking selfies with the artworks.⁴⁶ It is probably safe to assume that the affect of the work is minimal - even when people are paying to be in a space dedicated to art, they are not actively engaging with it.

Disposability could be written as a core value in the mission of the Western brand. Urban areas, educational institutions and the media universe are getting more externally curated, capitalized and competed over. There is less opportunity for accessing social narratives, experimentative creation and discovering variety in thinking or taking up room in public spaces. Our concrete living and socializing environments are shrinking while our temporary digital reach is expanding, making it more difficult to establish long-lasting day-to-day connections. Of all the places we are, the body is the one permanent thing we all have which is not directly controlled externally⁴⁷. The figure of our self-site stands out as a venue for individual agency. Different practices for customizing the body are found all over the world, and they are immediately connected to the rituals and codes humans use in archiving and communicating their identity, culture and separatism.

The situation of tattooing is intimate - all effort is focused on a single person, one at a time. The role of the tattooer is to help the person fulfill their intention for marking their skin permanently, and by doing so, reaching into the spiritual needs that exist beyond applying ink into skin in the form of an image. Tattooer, visual artist and oral historian Tamara Santibañez lists some of the intangible nuances present in tattooing;

Authority and ownership over one's own body

Recording one's history

Reclaiming the body after trauma

⁴⁶ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296475094_Time_Spent_Viewing_Art_and_Reading_Labels
(Accessed 23.5.23)

⁴⁷ The 'we' in this case refers to populations in free, democratic countries with extensive human rights laws. In countries such as Iran and the USA, the bodies of especially female citizens are controlled through legislation dictating uniform and access to birth control. Not abiding by the rules will lead to severe penalties, and the governments are implying strategic control policies to make sure people follow their rules.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-65220595>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/prosecutors-states-abortion-now-illegal-begin-prosecute-abortion-provi-rcna35268>

(Accessed 30.04.23)

Defying stereotypes or prescribed roles
Finding a sense of home and stability (in the permanence)
Expressing pride in a culture or identity
Resisting assimilation and erasure
Being seen how you want to be seen.⁴⁸

The distribution of these notions varies depending on the person and their agency with each individual tattoo. Practicing tattooing can be seen as community work, if it is chosen to be carried out with the needs of the client as a main priority alongside technical and creative execution. Moving towards tattooing as an arts' medium must be done consciously; I believe it to be impossible to achieve a sustainable long-term engagement with the craft without approaching it as collaboration.

What separates working with tattooing from most other art media is the interactions directly connected to it. In contrast to inanimate objects, such as sheets of paper or pixels, the material in case is living tissue, a human being, who will protest and hurt if you fail to take them into active consideration. The frame for expanding the opportunities in doing work on skin is narrower when working directly with and on people. Tattooing is constricted by concrete physical limitations, hygiene norms and social interactions, but I believe it can make a greater impact on society and its people than any object-based artwork can achieve. The point is not to tessellate the skin with ideas stemming from the universe of the artist and mediate them to the world, but instead work in dialogue with the client, and produce an enhancement fit specifically for their body and their situation.

Tapping into the constructive potential in tattooing requires connecting people with design options they resonate with. This is easier said than done – I often hear of the frustration of tattoo style and representation discussed in my community. People struggle with fulfilling the need to mark something important for themselves but find figurative representations alienating or unrelatable. Not everyone wishes to openly carry easily readable messages but would prefer to keep the meanings of their body art private. Reaching out to a tattooer offering custom work - even abstractions - is not always a solution as artists would often insist on creating pieces that would fit their portfolio instead of catering to their clients' wishes.

I felt solving the problems people were experiencing to be a professional responsibility, since there clearly was a need for a service nobody was providing.

⁴⁸ Santibañez. Could this be magic? *Tattooing as liberation work*

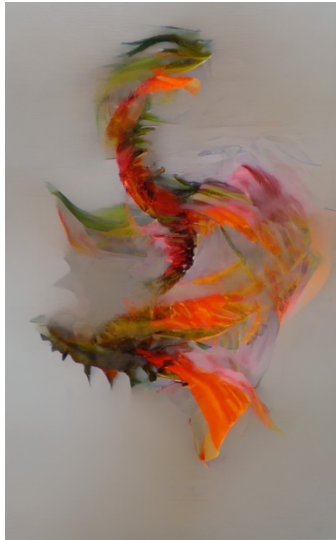
AI-FLASH – Text to tattoo

To make space for the voices of the people, communication was needed. Tattoo consultations normally include discussions about the project at hand, but there is a limit to what people are comfortable with stating aloud – and what the tattooer has the capacity to take on mentally. Especially with topics that connect to intimate feelings, particular life-changing experiences or memories, direct verbal communication between the tattooer and the client – two strangers - is not effective or possible. Talking about, listening to and being present with stories of the highs and lows of human life; trauma, mental illness, gender transition, survival, perseverance, giving birth and raising kids, losing loved ones, addiction, recovery, leaving destructive relationships, making friends, loss, joy, love, sex, sorrow, lust, anger, happiness... starts to wear you out eventually.

The solution to cushioning the intensity of the interactions came to me by chance. In December 2021, a friend of mine sent me a digital file that had come about using an online image diffusion program – artificial intelligence. The abstract image - supposedly a portrait of myself - as they explained, was made up by feeding a text prompt into the algorithm. The image, titled ‘Maria tattooing and printing’, caught my curiosity. I stared at my phone screen and could not wrap my head around what I was looking at; the image looked nothing like me but still it was me, as intended by my friend. I was provoked by the realization that I was unable to place the image, nor myself, under any label my brain was trying to find as an explanation. I was looking at a representation of an idea of myself, that took its starting point from my friend’s intention that they chose to define with job-related guidelines. I had no authority over the prompts and no access to the process coded into the algorithm, but I could decide what to do with the resulting visual material.

I sketched a hybrid procedure based on the traditional ‘Get what you get’ method. Instead of a gumball machine, I would use the algorithm on my digital device, and instead of a coin, the client would insert their keywords. The software offered me tools for brainstorming visual options, shielding the participants from the stress of handling intimacy. The material spat out by the machine would be developed into a bespoke design, made to fit the body – making a one-to-one copy would be impossible due to the parameter differences of the pixel universe and tattooing as a physical craft. I would offer my executive skills, accompanied by technical, compositional, and mental guidance as needed.

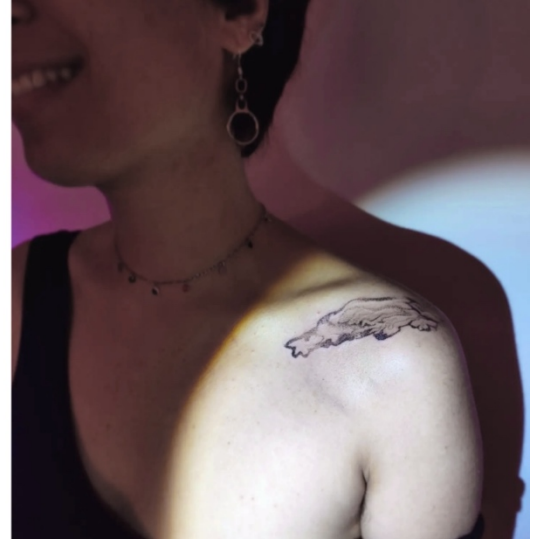
There was no requirement for transparency; the client would be the only one who knew what the words represented, allowing them to embed hidden intentions in the text. Stripped of conventional symbolism, the resulting tattoo would not reveal itself to anyone else but the person who carried it. Including opaque contemporary digital technology opiated both me and the participating person into a collaborative dreaming state where the deepest meaning of the art-work was present as a ghost, whose desires could be fulfilled through the ritual of tattooing.



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Like A Fish Transforming Into a Dragon. Improvisation And Development Envisaged
Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin
Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Narcissus Aurora Rare Euphoria Green Pink Aalto
Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin
Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Tranquilidad

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

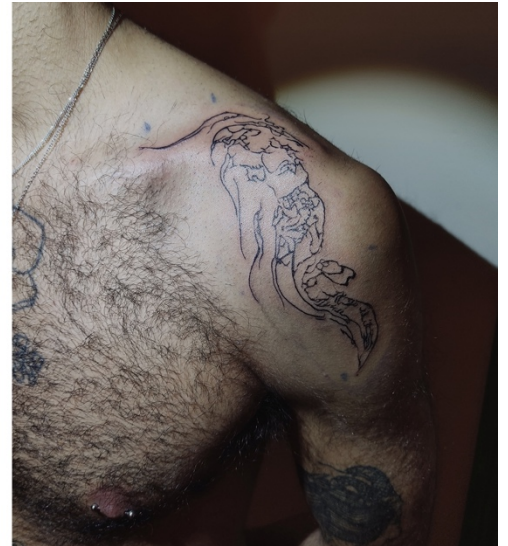
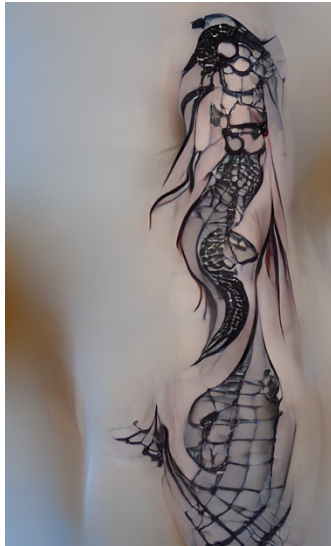
Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Mushroom Ethereal Delicate

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;

Sword Mermaid Erotic Gothic

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;

Care Future

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

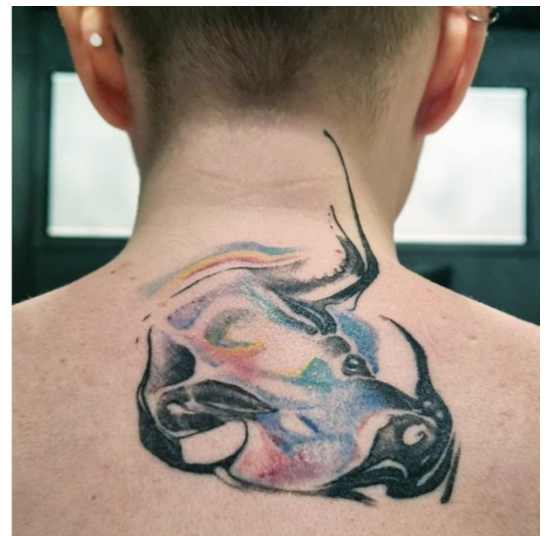
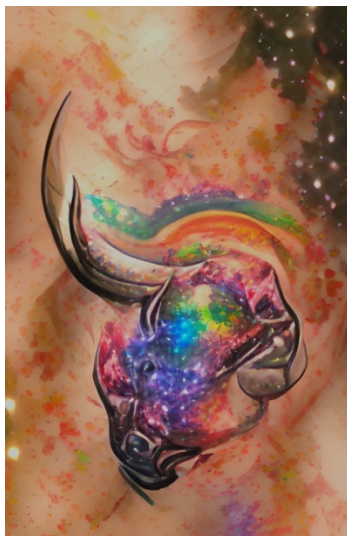
Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Finnish-Persian Art

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

Right – Freshly applied tattoo



Left – Algorithm generated visual, based on the text;
Cosmic Rainbow Taurus

Middle – Sketch for the stencil transfer, used as a carrier to be placed on the skin

Right – Freshly applied tattoo



AI Flash – Contemporary Perspective on the Art of Tattooing
Artist Book

Hand-bound Swiss softcover

Edition of 20, 106 pages

Covers and translucent pages screen-printed with hectographic ink

Block images in duotone risograph (teal + burgundy) and texts in flat gold

ISBN: 978-952-94-7136-2

The journal contains thematic texts about the research project, documentation of the digital visuals, stencil sketches and tattoos alongside a selection of citations and participant experiences, collected from the individual tattoo sessions between Dec 2021 and Sep 2022.



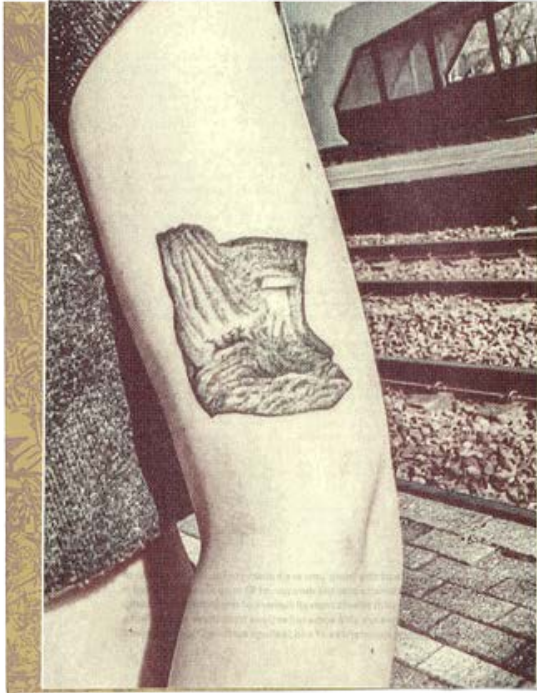




I had dark thoughts about myself and wanted to stomp them away. I almost feel like the tattoo should have been a little more painful and should have made a bigger impact.

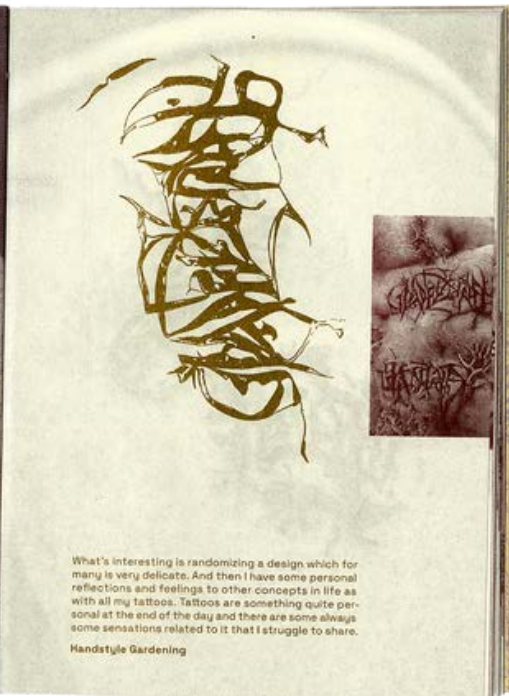
Life Is Not A Marathon





I wanted to take a concept which is very important and meaningful to me and see how a program would visualise this feeling. As a person with mental health issues, this comfort and feeling of safety is something I really need from time to time. I wanted the program to reflect the atmosphere of "resting".

Blanket Warm Bed Sleep



What's interesting is randomizing a design which for many is very delicate. And then I have some personal reflections and feelings to other concepts in life as with all my tattoos. Tattoos are something quite personal at the end of the day and there are some always some sensations related to it that I struggle to share.

Handstyle Gardening



Body-suits – Ma(r)king a community

The social purpose for marking the body varies depending on the politics of bodies and the societies they situate in. Anthropologist Nicholas Thomas writes about body art as a carrier of culture; across the globe, tattooing is practiced to communicate an individual's relationship with the social groups they relate to. In tribal communities, decorative ornamental patterns affirm belonging and status within the group's inner hierarchy. Designs are not often individually decided on, but rather received as a part of maturing or applied as signals of hit milestones or other important stages a person undergoes as a part of their journey within the community.

The situation is different in the West, where aboriginal groups were first systematically eradicated during the rule of the Christian church, which later broke down into secular counties with common national cultures. Individual nations have been developing towards increasingly individual-specific societies - especially since the industrial revolution and the rise of social media. Europe is currently ongoing an era of post-colonial unraveling and polarizing nationalism, where many are actively reconsidering and rebuilding their identities and relationships with the world around them. I know, see, and hear of many with their roots in colonized cultures, who are reconnecting with the damaged parts of themselves and their families by learning the languages and traditions that were – and still are - forbidden by European imperialism⁴⁹. It is not uncommon for the young generation to seek out tattoos like the ones they remember their old relatives having, or what they have seen in family albums.

Healing from the destructive past and now is different to those of us who stand on the other side of history; as a white Nordic person, I am not urgently prevented from existing in a certain way, nor is my way of living officially questioned. Instead of trying to connect to my 'Finnishness'⁵⁰, I feel a need to separate myself from the things that could be assumed of me based on the language and looks I have been assigned by my genetics and birth location. To me personally, altering my looks is a pursuit of separatism and a form of reclaiming agency over my body. As there is no long-standing healing tradition to fall back on, I choose to build my own comfort.

⁴⁹ In northern Norway, the state government is implementing sales and set-up of wind-turbine networks, which are damaging the traditional reindeer herding businesses of the indigenous Sami populations. The turbines are set up on Sami land, blocking the traditional use of it as flock herding areas. The land should be protected according to the minority legislations of Norway, that should guarantee the Sami population their right for exercising their culture.

https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/nye-vindkraftverk-planlegges-i-finnmark_-farer-med-logn-for-a-komme-seg-hit-1.16220127
(Accessed 30.04.2023)

⁵⁰ Finland has a strange history as a disregarded buffer space in between the Swedish and Russian/Soviet imperiums – the land has bounced back and forth, had its official languages and religions switched around and the national culture has been artificially built since the 19th century and upon gaining independency. The country does not have cohesive recorded roots or tribal traditions, and it is, as a modern nation, still actively executing destructive politics towards its Sapmi, Karelian and Roma populations. As a secular contemporary person, I have a hard time relating and 'returning' to some ancient folky forest magic beliefs, but I don't feel a connection to the nationalistic Finnish identity either, since it is heavily built on the ideals of national socialism, and is often hostile towards internationalization, multiculturalism and queerness.

Queer populations use the term 'chosen family' to refer to nonbiological kinship bonds and relationships people form apart from their biological relatives. Chosen families are groups of people who mutually support and love each other out of personal decision, not because of immediate biological ties or origin. Learning from the traditions of tribal cultures, where tattoos are used to state connection, I started working with the same algorithm that I used in the AI-Flash process and began building blueprints for abstract tattoos that would represent the possibility to choose one's own belonging. For the text prompts, I selected six headlines from Nicholas Thomas' book 'Body Art', each describing universal societal references in body art practices across cultures:

Humanity

Society

Theatricality

Beauty

Criminality

Identity

I started curating and collaging the visuals the program made and fitted them on top of life-sized body suit patterns that I screen-printed on paper. The format is commonly used as a template for elaborate watercolor paintings in Japanese irezumi⁵¹ tradition, in which painting extensive studies of the traditional designs is considered a fundamental part of the discipline.

⁵¹ Irezumi is the Japanese word for tattoo. In the West, it is also used as a blanket term refer to Japanese-style tattoos.



Skin 1

Screen-print and pen on coffee-stained paper

120x76cm

2023



Skin 2

Screen-print and pen on coffee-stained paper

120x76cm

2023



Skin 3

Screen-print and pen on coffee-stained paper

120x76cm

2023

While I was making tattoos and working on the series of printed works, I naturally had conversations with the participating people and other tattooers I shared working spaces with. Many of the more experienced tattooers would often kindly laugh at my descriptions of my master research, often followed by a remark; ‘that’s what tattooing has always been about!’, encouraging me to go study the collections of books in the shops. I spent time reading about the history and found a strange thing; most of the works recorded and celebrated were made by men. This did not add up with the oral history circulating in the field – I would hear about people of color, queer folks and women establishing great careers and about their meticulous work developing the standards of the craft and their struggle with the patriarchal system, but images of their flash or tattoos were nonexistent in the archives. Even online, I could not get my hands on more than a couple articles listing names and showing portraits of female tattooers in little clothing, but no extensive catalogues of their actual work besides a few curiosity examples. One of the shops I worked at even had a framed portrait of Maud Wagner, who is known as the first female tattooer to ever have practiced professionally in the USA⁵², but the owner was unable to point me to Maud’s work.

In addition to Wagner, a couple names were repeatedly mentioned in the online articles; Betty Broadbent, Dainty Dotty, Jacci Gresham, Jessie Knight, and Shanghai Kate. Six famous pioneering female tattooers, but no proper evidence supporting their reputation. I meticulously collected a few of their flashes and ran them through a generative online algorithm that could make up mock-up versions based on the source images. I arranged the newly imagined flash on sheets of traditionally coffee-stained paper, rub-transferred them on, and colored the faux images with tattoo inks that had been banned from use since the REACH-legislation⁵³ put into action in early 2022.

The portfolio, consisting of six faux flash sheets, is made as an homage to the universal spirit of the field; if you cannot find what you are looking for, you make it happen yourself.

⁵² It is important to point out that the histories point out to mostly white, European-descendent Americans. The native and racialized populations of the land have their own, extensive tattoo cultures, which existed long before colonization, whom have their own characters and professional practitioners. Here, the printed archive is in an even worse state, but it is not my business as a white European to start vocalizing and filling in the traditions of communities that I do not belong to. I choose to focus on learning from the whole pool, and then transferring the good that I have been taught to my own materials and subjects – it is important to know when to take up space, and when to let others reclaim it back.

⁵³ Starting January 2022, the EU enacted new legislation covering pigments in tattoo inks. The law, which was developed by people completely outside the tattoo world, received major pushback within the field, who argued there was no scientific, nor experience-based evidence supporting the ban of certain pigments. Since then the cost of ink has tripled, and many tattooers report inconsistencies in ink formula, alongside with general poorer quality.

<https://www.miljodirektoratet.no/ansvarsomrader/kjemikalier/kjemikalier-i-tatoveringsblekk-og-permanent-sminke/>
(Accessed 30.04.23)



Faux Flash – After Betty Broadbent, Jessie Knight, Jacci Gresham, Dainty Dotty, Maud Wagner and Shanghai Kate.

32x5x42 cm Fabric-covered portfolio with gold stamps, lined with screen-printed hectographic ink

Six 28x37cm coffee stained flash sheets, with rub transfer images, colored with tattoo ink

2022



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