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## Abstract

My master's work follows a recycled thread that passed through the hands of many, over generations and different contexts. My work gives it new life through collective handicrafts – knitting, in particular. The thread unites communities through participatory art, educational practices in arts and crafts, and mediation as a means to empower audiences as active co-creators of reality. Through examples of my collaborative works bridging the past decade, along with reflections on the research I performed during my master's studies, I reevaluate and reconsider these approaches. My master's thesis is a cumulative work that unites multiple essays in two chapters.

Chapter one focuses on the *Art and Witchcraft Department* project. The department serves as a nomadic hub for alternative education, following a credo of 'minimum resources, maximum knowledge'. The project fits years of experience and multiple knowledges literally into a pocket. Filled with recycled threads, simple tools like wooden sticks and hooks for hand knitting, this pocket department can be activated anywhere. It emerged as a response to the rigid structures of Western academia, emphasising instead diverse forms of knowledge production through artistic means. This approach helps to lay the decolonial groundwork to move forward.

Chapter two delves into the realm of slow media and handicrafts, particularly knitting, in bridging conflicts and fostering community cohesion. These include recycling waste materials, fostering collaboration towards collectivity, prioritising handcraft, and emphasising care and healing as practices of magic.

By intertwining the past, present and future, this paper explores the complex roles of witchcraft practices that undergo transformational evolution, fostering unity across time and borders, transforming waste (wasted time, material waste) into the art of relations.

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## Introduction

The contemporary world faces ongoing challenges as it navigates the echoes of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, geopolitical tensions, escalating military conflicts, constant forced migration, rapid technological advancements and accelerating capitalism and neoliberalism. In this complex landscape, staying stabilised is almost impossible.

Thus *The Art and Witchcraft Department* project appeared. At first it was a joke. Every joke has its share of jokes. There were many reasons for this joke: months of waiting, a hole in a shoe, a bitten cheek, naivety, a secret pocket tension. The project emerged from the rifts in reality, delving into suppressed knowledge and overlooked magic. It empowers the excluded and marginalised through practices of care, skilled handcrafts, and alternative education. Micro-actions, experimental workshops, and healing practices shape its collective gatherings. Originating as a response to academic art education during my studies, it unites inner personalities and their collaborators, hosting DJ sets, seminars, workshops and magical actions.

I'm not alone in exploring the figure of the witch and textile magic. My engagement is informed by the collective efforts of writers, scholars, researchers, curators, and artists, exemplified by various exhibitions and written works. Over the last two years I have had a chance to see many related exhibitions – the group show *YoYI! Care, Repair, Heal* (Berlin, Gropius Bau, 2022–23); the solo exhibition *Monica Sjöö: The Great Cosmic Mother* (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2023); the *lumbung* approach of documenta fifteen (Kassel, 2022); *Corpus Infinitum* by Arjuna Neuman and Denise Ferreira da Silva (Oslo, Munch Museum, ongoing until May 2024); *Textile Magic: Doris Wiklund, Kristina Pashkova, Maja Fredin, Matilda Kenttä* (Kiruna, Kin Museum for Contemporary Art, ongoing until May 2024) and *Art as Punishment: Agder Art Academy* (Oslo, Kunsternes Hus, 2023–24).

How to reappear? The common knowledge in my head says: follow the thread. I call my mother; she is an artist as well, and ever since the first second-hand stores appeared in Russia in the 90s, she has been buying cashmere pullovers there to recycle for thread.



## **Chapter One**



## The Witch Can Switch

My master's thesis centres on collaborative work around recycling threads. Drawing from a broad witchcraft perspective, I focus on handicrafts and their connection to collectivity. This field, once central but marginalised by industrialization and market logic, underscores the significance of simple creative actions rooted in daily life, which historically built collective social bonds where the commons played a crucial role. Silvia Federici's seminal work *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* foregrounds the witch's voice and analyses the transition from feudalism to capitalism, highlighting the femicide and *epistemicide*<sup>1</sup> of the late Middle Ages:

*Beside encouraging collective decision-making and work cooperation, the commons were the material foundation upon which peasant solidarity and sociality could thrive. All the festivals, games, and gatherings of the peasant community were held on the commons. The social function of the commons was especially important for women, who, having less ties to land and less social power, were more dependent on them for their subsistence, autonomy, and sociality.*<sup>2</sup>

Following Federici, in her essay 'What Lenin Teaches Us About Witchcraft'<sup>3</sup> Oxana Timofeeva has posited witchcraft as a skill to make social changes differently. According to Timofeeva, witches dwell in these in-between spaces, plugging cracks in reality with their bodies and challenging the laws of the world. Thus, the witch can switch from the individual mode of production toward the collective, challenging norms and unleashing transformative forces that transcend limitations and hardship. In the broader academic and artistic landscape, participation is key to breaking away from traditional power dynamics and amplifying suppressed perspectives. This inclusive approach aligns with the principles of alternative knowledge systems, which aim to create a more equitable and diverse intellectual landscape.



*Welcome to the Art and Witchcraft Department! / Mending Session.*

Reception Gallery, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway, 2023. Photo by Anastasya Kizilova.

1 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: justice against epistemicide* (London: Routledge, 2016).

2 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (London: Penguin, 2021), 132.

3 Oxana Timofeeva, 'What Lenin Teaches Us About Witchcraft', *e-Flux Journal* no. 100 (May 2019), [www.e-flux.com/journal/100/268602/what-lenin-teaches-us-about-witchcraft](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/268602/what-lenin-teaches-us-about-witchcraft) (accessed April 10, 2024)

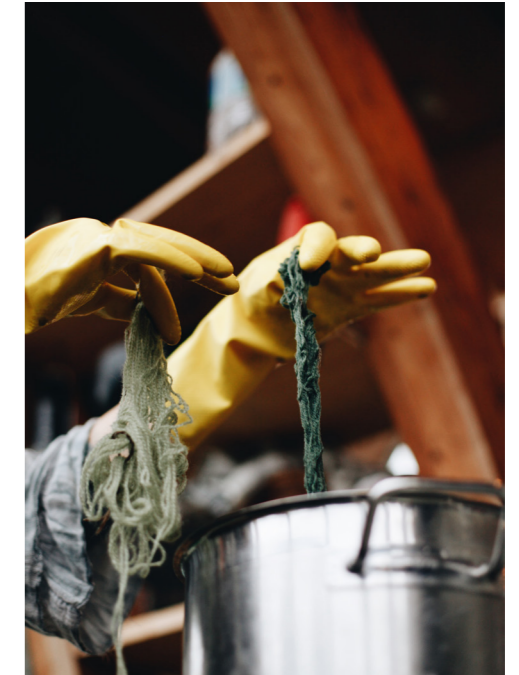


## The Magic of the Commons

The history of the relationship between arts and crafts reflects the emergence of capitalism and a long-standing division. Despite strides toward equality, crafts remain marginalised, both overshadowed by contemporary art's domination and challenged by industrialisation and digitisation. Jill Lepore and Hito Steyerl offer critical insights into contemporary work dynamics, questioning labour-reward balance. While Lepore<sup>4</sup> critiques the DIY movement's commercialisation, Steyerl has highlighted precarity within the contemporary art system<sup>5</sup>. Their analyses shed light on gendered stereotypes, lack of recognition for women artists, the exploitation of unpaid, gendered labour and the blurring of disciplinary boundaries between arts and crafts. Thus, escaping from both art and craft, I switched to witchcraft.

My project *The Art and Witchcraft Department* embodies a multifaceted, non-hierarchical approach to knowledge accumulation and reassembly. Witchcraft, as a form of alternative knowledge production, transcends oppressive structures and redefines the relationship between society and craft. During my two-year Master's studies, I honed mediums ranging from dyeing with natural pigments to digital and analog photography. Notably, I emphasised dematerialisation by repurposing waste materials. This allowed me to decentre commodity value and instead focus on collectivity and common places as a hosting ground for practical magic.

For example, I was part of the Losæter urban farm community in Oslo. In collaboration with Francesca Tullio, I worked on a plant dye garden project there and arranged a natural dye workshop, among other ecofeminist activities, for two summer seasons in 2022 and 2023. Anne Beate Hovind spearheaded the project, blending farming, art and urban development. The temporary art installation *The Flatbread Society Bakinghouse* by The Future Farmers collective, a summer baking house, enhanced the farm's appeal. It became a hub for a diverse international community, fostering connections through soil, creating a strong sense of belonging.



*The Art and Witchcraft Department / Colour it UP!* Plant dye workshop organised in collaboration with Francesca Tullio (Naturally Artsy). Urban Farm Losæter, Oslo, 2023. Photo by Rebecca Haweks.

<sup>4</sup> Jill Lepore, 'What's Wrong with the Way We Work', *New Yorker*, January 11, 2021, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/01/18/whats-wrong-with-the-way-we-work](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/01/18/whats-wrong-with-the-way-we-work) (accessed April 10, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Hito Steyerl, 'Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy', *e-flux Journal* no. 21 (December 2010), [www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy) (accessed April 10, 2024).



## Why Create a Department?

My critique of current Western academic institutions stems from concerns about the privatisation of knowledge, reinforcing hierarchical structures and the decreasing relevance of academic knowledge to societal realities. This growing corporatisation of academia, intertwined with cognitive capitalism, is exemplified by the abolition of free education for non-EU citizens, such as Norway's introduction of tuition fees in 2023.

Madina Tlostanova further underscores the need to decolonise institutions of knowledge production<sup>6</sup>, challenging prevailing power dynamics. Decolonization involves unravelling historical inequalities, reclaiming suppressed cultures, and fostering inclusivity, justice and equity for a transformative future.

Exploring Nordic educational systems, I found some inspiring examples, such as Nordic folk high schools rooted in N. F. S. Grundtvig's philosophy.<sup>7</sup> The education system focuses on self-development, pedagogical freedom, collaboration and preparing students for active societal participation. Kultivator Art Collective, based in Öland, implements this approach through anti-industrial principles and communal living, integrating farming, art practices and teaching. Their work *Popup Folkhögskola*<sup>8</sup> activates the area between two residential areas in Kalmar municipality, promoting collective existence and the preservation of forms of free knowledge distribution. Initiatives like Kunst i Skolen<sup>9</sup> in Norway serve as art mediators and educators, with textiles playing a significant role. The rise of feminist, decolonial, participatory textile art reflects a growing focus on inclusion, sustainability, and alternative education. For example, the exhibition *Art as Punishment: Agder Art Academy* demonstrates an inclusive approach that includes art education in prison. Tensta Konsthall led me to the projects *The Silent University*, by Ahmet Ögüt, and *The Women's Café*, initiated and run by women from the Järva area.



Anastasya Kizilova. *The Artist's Uniform / Pocket Department*, detail. Oslo, 2022. Photo by Anastasya Kizilova.

<sup>6</sup> Madina Tlostanova, *Dekolonial'nost' bytiia, znaniia i oshchushcheniia* [Decolonising being, knowledge and perception] (Almaty: Tselinny Centre of Contemporary Culture, 2020), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Tomas Björkman and Lene Rachel Andersen, *The Nordic Secret: A European Story of Beauty and Freedom* (Copenhagen: Nordic Bildung, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Photos of the project are available at [www.kultivator.org/popup-folkhogskola](http://www.kultivator.org/popup-folkhogskola) (accessed April 22, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the initiative, see [www.kunstiskolen.no](http://www.kunstiskolen.no) (accessed April 22, 2024).



## The Artist's Uniform

I received an academic art education with a focus on fashion design at the Stiglitz Art Academy in Saint Petersburg. Upon graduating in 2010, I encountered economic precarity and developed neuroses triggered by the competitive dynamics within the Russian artistic community. This environment was exacerbated by an increasingly inhospitable political climate towards artists in Russia. I realised that socially engaged artists were particularly vulnerable in this context. Their precarious economic status, coupled with the growing repressiveness of Russian cultural policies, led to the displacement of socially critical art and the marginalisation of freedom-minded artists.

Observing this situation, I recognised the urgent need for support and solidarity within the creative class comprising artists, curators, theorists and philosophers. This context led me to launch the *Artist's Uniform* project, which sparked the formation of spontaneous communities. Its essence is based on the utopian task, to provide all interested artists with uniforms, the design of which is based on the ideas of Russian avant-garde. Since 2014 I offer to buy (in exchange for work or for a cash consideration) a unique uniform. Each piece is hand-made by me and is unique to an artist's measurements. Thus a dialogue with the artistic community appears, which points to important issues affecting the current problems: economic guarantees of labor in the artistic system, communication and other aspects of aesthetics. The uniform, as the material implementation of the project, becomes a visual hallmark that can operate far beyond the art system as a unifying communication element. Once launched, I promised never to stop the project. Indeed, I brought my personal uniform to Oslo. Moreover, I made it a rule that every new project I start should be scaled up to the uniform: fit the pocket, be a part of the garment.

Subsequently, the project evolved into *The Citizen's Uniform*, a nomadic upcycling workshop where participants created costumes and contemplated the meaning of citizenship. Through this interactive experience, visitors were encouraged to reflect on the question 'What does it mean to be a citizen?'

Thus, the institutional critique embedded in my practice and the initiatives I have been inspired by establishes important value coordinates, such as rejecting strict division into disciplines, making knowledge accessible and promoting inclusion through art practices. United by these shared values, these projects offer hope that education and art will be accessible to broad, transnational circles of society.





## Participation

In 2021–2022 I practised art while employed as a tutor at a public sewing workshop based in a municipal youth club.<sup>10</sup> I made collective work around textile recycling and upcycling a main principle of the sewing workshop. I framed this job as a form that influenced the social matrix and was closely related to the practices I know as participatory art. Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg coined the term *third place* to describe the informal meeting places that lie between the home (*first place*) and the workplace (*second place*). These third places, such as cafés, bars and libraries, provide opportunities for informal socialising and community building, fostering local identity and supporting civic engagement. According to Oldenburg, third places prioritise social connections over productivity, which has a fosters a vibrant, participatory democratic society.<sup>11</sup>

The approach I have used in this thesis project follows the relational and participatory turn in the arts, which has further evolved into *educational turn*<sup>12</sup>. This transformation stems from the dematerialisation of art initiated by the conceptual turn and embraced by artists and theorists seeking to blur the boundaries between art and life. The women’s liberation movement, and recognition of the soft mediums influenced the shift. Pioneers in dematerialisation such as Lucy Lippard<sup>13</sup>, along with artists like Lidia Klark, Faith Wilding, Yoko Ono and Rosemarie Trockel, interrogate the borders and limits of art, pushing towards critical approaches and activism, shedding light on vulnerable issues of inequality. Subsequently, in the 2010s, the educational turn became a prominent trend in Western mega-shows, placing forms of creative knowledge production at the forefront as a counterbalance to market logic. Thus, self-organisation, artist-run hubs, self-publishing and art mediation emerged as key instruments of communication between cultural workers, artists and audiences. Their overarching goal is to transform the art field into an active platform for the production of social fabric, fostering engagement and dialogue within broader society.



Molodezhnyi tsentr ‘Obshchesvennyye masterskie’ ili ‘Angar’ [Youth Club]. Saint-Petersburg, 2020–2022.

Two top photos by Arina Ziryakova. Bottom: Magazine Sobaka.RU no. 240, January 2021.

Photo by Alexey Kostromin.

<sup>10</sup> Photos of the space are available at [ooley.ru/theory/research/polozhenie-angar](https://ooley.ru/theory/research/polozhenie-angar) (accessed April 27, 2024)

<sup>11</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories About the ‘Great Good Places’ at the Heart of Our Communities* (Chicago: Da Capo Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Mick Wilson and Paul O’Neill. *Curating and the Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).



## **Chapter Two**



## Second-Hand Child

Ever since a second hand market appeared after the collapse of the USSR in the early 90s, my mother used to buy cashmere jumpers there to unravel for thread. New yarn made in the USSR was raw, prickly and colourless, and it was as much a staple of this reality as black-and-white tv.

In her book *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, Svetlana Alexievich chronicles a chorus of personal stories from witnesses of perestroika, many of which are marked by disillusionment and dashed dreams. People did not anticipate that the regime that was luring them in with its promises would be replaced by capitalism instead of realising the ideals of real socialism:

*Our country was suddenly covered in banks and billboards. A new breed of goods appeared. Instead of crummy boots and frumpy dresses, we finally got the stuff we'd always dreamed of: blue jeans, winter coats, lingerie, and decent crockery... everything bright and beautiful. Our old Soviet stuff was grey, ascetic, and looked as if it had been manufactured in wartime. The libraries and theatres stood empty. Markets and shops had taken their place.<sup>1</sup>*

I grew up during the collapse of the USSR. Despite the ongoing changes, it was a time of extreme social stratification. Both my parents are artists, and the turbulent time challenged them. As a child I played along food queues, hid from street crime and enjoyed the ingenuity of poverty in times of 'deficit' (goods shortages). Second-hand shops were distinguished by their English signage, the pungent smell of formaldehyde used for disinfection, and their chaotic assortment of Western-style clothing. Initially, these shops comprised vast hangars filled with metal cots bearing heaps of clothes, priced by weight.

'First look at the colour and find one you like', my mother instructed me, explaining how not to get lost in a pile of second-hand clothes. 'Then feel it, and if you like the texture, take it out of the pile.' So my mother's fingers were always busy, dancing with the threads and knitting needles.

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<sup>1</sup> Svetlana Aleksievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, trans. Bela Shayevich (New York: Random House, 2017), 49–50.





## Hand Knitting

Hand knitting is recognised as a practice of care and healing, both individual and collective. Collaborative projects like *The Weary of Life Knit Cafe* project by Anne Marte Overaa<sup>2</sup>, *Common Sense* by Sheila Pepe<sup>3</sup> and the book *Depression: A Public Feeling* by Ann Cvetkovich<sup>4</sup> further demonstrate knitting's potential as a tool for healing, reunification, integration and community building, fostering artistic expression among diverse participants.

My project *Stitches of Care* is a collaborative project fostering cultural connections between women, children newly arrived from Ukraine and residents of Bærum municipality in Norway. It was co-designed with curator Ekaterina Sharova and supported by Jorunn Liodden of Bærum Frivilligsentral. *Stitches of Care* not only facilitated artistic expression but also served as a form of alternative education open for everyone, fostering a sense of grounding and psychological belonging to both the local community and the new culture.

In his essay 'Knowledge in Hand: Exploration of the Brain, Hand, and Tool', Trevor H. J. Marchant examines the intricate relationship between the physical, neurological and cultural aspects of handcraft, with a particular focus on carpentry and its interaction with the environment:

*The tool, as an extension of the mechanics of the body in space, extends one's sense of nearness. Indeed studies show that when using a hand-held tool, the brain registers a haptic signal of what is being touched as though it were coming from the operational end of the tool, not from the fingertips.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the tools for hand knitting are literally tools of transformation of body-mind-environment relations. Using the vocabulary of Art and Witchcraft, I would call this a magic of touch.



Anastasya Kisilova, *Stitches of Care* (Curator: Ekaterina Sharova). Frivilling Bærum, Norway, 2023.

Photo by Jacky Jaan-Yaan Kuo.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Marte Overaa, *The Weary of Life Knit Cafe*, March 9, 2016, participatory artwork, Martin Bryder Gallery, Lund, [www.annemarteoveraa.se/The-weary-of-life-knit-cafe](http://www.annemarteoveraa.se/The-weary-of-life-knit-cafe) (accessed April 28, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Pepe, *Common Sense II*, 2010, participatory yarn installation, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvcRorTkW70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvcRorTkW70) (accessed April 28, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Trevor H. J. Marchant, 'Knowledge in Hand: Exploration of the Brain, Hand, and Tool', in *Documents on Contemporary Crafts 1-5*, ed. André Gali and Hege Henriksen (Oslo: Arnoldsche Art), 82-99.



## The Shawl

Shawl is a word shared across many languages, dating back to the 1660s in ‘Urdu and other Indian languages [...] As the name of an article of clothing worn by Western women, it is recorded from 1767’.<sup>6</sup> In Russia before the revolution, both *platok* (a large, square scarf or headscarf) and *shal’* (shawl) served a similar function but with different class connotations. Post-revolution, shawl became a common term for triangular, square or rectangular woollen garments.<sup>7</sup> In my analysis, I use the word ‘shawl’ from this perspective, keeping in mind that this form of clothes has many names.

Cristian Krohg’s painting *Kampen for Tilværelsen*<sup>8</sup> (Struggle for existence, c. 1888–89) reflects the reality of that time in a detailed, realistic manner. It shows a frosty sunny morning. Many hands reach out for a piece of bread. Women and kids, probably workers of newly opened textile factories, are wrapped in tied shawls. A crowd of children with cans and baskets in their bare hands wait. A gendarme is approaching along the snow-covered road. The outline of the buildings is very reminiscent of the Grunerlokka neighbourhood.

A 1920 work by Yulia Razumovskaya, *The People You Meet on the Streets of Moscow*<sup>9</sup>, depicts five figures from the back, four of whom are women and girls wrapped in simple shawls. The colour and arrangement of the shawls show that they are more a protection from the wind and cold than a status symbol, as are their shoes – typically peasant. Most likely these shawls were woven or knitted by artisanal craftsmen or by the peasant women themselves. Before the industrial age, manual labour practices were an indispensable part of daily life.

6 Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. ‘shawl (n)’, accessed April 28, 2024, [www.etymonline.com/search?q=shawl](http://www.etymonline.com/search?q=shawl).

7 Nataliia Kochelaeva, ‘Shal’, platok i polushalok...’, *Nauka i Zhizn* [Science and Life Magazine] no. 7 (2021), [m.nkj.ru/archive/articles/41720/#:~:text=](http://m.nkj.ru/archive/articles/41720/#:~:text=).

8 Christian Krohg, *Kampen for Tilværelsen*, 1889, oil on canvas, 226 x 300 cm, National Museum, Oslo, [www.nasjonalmuseet.no/samlingen/objekt/NG.M.00348](http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/samlingen/objekt/NG.M.00348) (accessed April 28, 2024).

9 Tatiana Strizhenova, *Soviet Costume and Textiles 1917–1945* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 44–46.





At that same time, early avant-garde artist Nadezhda Lamanova, in collaboration with Vera Mukhina, published the first magazine with designs for the first mass clothing in the Soviet Union (a prototype of later women's magazines).<sup>10</sup> There, among other everyday outfits, is a dress designed from shawls common for that time. Representations of women textile creators transformed along with Soviet ideology. In the early 20s, textile artists were flagship revolutionaries and innovators who gave voice to advanced ideas shaping a new culture of everyday life (Popova, Stepanova, Mukhina). However, as the regime consolidated power, especially towards the repressions of 1937, women textile workers were suppressed, divided and alienated as one-option sewing machine operators carrying out commands on the assembly line.

A simple everyday shawl, without a pattern, in a dark shade of red, was part of an exhibition called *Material: Women's Memories of the GULAG*. The show was initiated and produced by International Memorial (Moscow). Behind the soft objects on display – toys for babies, small bags to carry personal belongings (a piece of earth from one's home, ashes), thread to cut bread – hovered the personal stories of women repressed and exiled to Soviet camps.

*Needles, of course, were forbidden. We would make them from the broken teeth of a comb. An eye was burned into them using a smuggled-in safety pin, whose tip was heated on a match – smoking was allowed, so we had matches. We got thread by unravelling torn stockings and tights. We used to tear up old underwear for scraps. We were skilled at drawn thread work (iskusno merezhili) and embroidery (Taganskaya prison).<sup>11</sup>*

Many of the textile objects created under the harsh conditions of prison restrictions are in contrast very joyful and cheerful. The women did not romanticise imprisonment, but they wanted warmth, joy and happiness. As the curators hoped, the textiles and other handicrafts on display evoked



Anastasya Kizilova, Olga Kizilova. *The Shawl*. Saint Petersburg, Russia, 2023.

Photo by Anastasya Kizilova.

<sup>10</sup> Strizhenova, *Soviet Costume*, 68–95.

<sup>11</sup> Wall text from Irina Shcherbakova, Irina Ostrovskaya, and Alena Kozlova (curators), *Material. Zhenskaia pamiat' o GULAGe* [Material: Women's memories of the GULAG]. Exhibition organised by and presented at International Memorial, Moscow, June 2021–January 2022. Translation by Anastasya Kizilova. Note the Ukrainian tradition of drawnwork, *merzhka*, that the speaker refers to.



emotional responses and media resonance from visitors.<sup>12</sup>

Britta Marakatt-Labba tells stories of the Sami people through embroidery. Industrialisation and the turn to extractivism have dramatically affected Sami land and culture, destroying many lives. Marakatt-Labba, in a mystical and mythological way, expresses these narratives through the slow medium of miniature and detailed embroidery, sharing personal stories. In the artwork titled *We Wrote a Letter*<sup>13</sup>, eight figures dressed in the traditional Sami colours of red, green, and blue are covered by a blanket-like rectangle or giant (collective?) letter. Their heads are covered, likely with shawls (as hats have different silhouettes and are usually red, while here they are different colours). I don't know the history of this piece, and I can only guess the story behind it, but what is clear is the strong, collective women's power it portrays.

A few years ago, my mother suggested knitting a warm hat out of recycled yarn from her collection. Unable to find the right style to fit my curly, fluffy head, she turned to shawls. We agreed on the simple triangle design. Thus, she started knitting, creating different color versions of the unified shape. Then I moved for studies, but she continued to knit. Thus, the shawl became the medium that bonded us.

Today, the shawl is a historical canvas. So powerful, marginalised, spiritual, religious – it is still so practically used in everyday life. It may seem risky to use the unifying word 'shawl'. However, I consciously embrace this choice after recognising its ability to unite diverse cultures and languages. I embark on a transcultural journey, distinguishing between cultural appropriation and assimilation. The shawl thus becomes an inspirational gateway to transnational unity, serving as a symbol of recognition and commonality.



Anastasya Kizilova, Olga Kizilova. *The Shawl*. Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway, 2023.

Photo by Anastasya Kizilova.

12 See, for example Lilia Palveleva, 'Vyshivki i zaplaty. Povsednevnaia zhizn' zhenshchin v stalinskikh lageriakh', *Radio Svoboda*, October 13, 2021, [www.svoboda.org/a/vyshivki-i-zaplaty-povsednevnyaya-zhizn-zhenshin-v-stalinskikh-lageryah/31503351.html](http://www.svoboda.org/a/vyshivki-i-zaplaty-povsednevnyaya-zhizn-zhenshin-v-stalinskikh-lageryah/31503351.html) (accessed April 18, 2024).

13 Britta Marakatt-Labba, *We Wrote a Letter*, 1995, embroidery on fabric, in the exhibition *Moving the Needle* at the National Museum, Oslo, March–August 2024.



## Art and Witchcraft Department: Shawl Mediation

My graduation piece, *Art and Witchcraft Department: Shawl Mediation*, invites viewers to participate in collective gatherings where knitted shawls, made of recycled yarn play a role of mediator fostering collective connections through time and borders.

Shawls knitted by my mother<sup>14</sup> will mark the space as open for participation. The room of Skylight Gallery, a white cube with a glass ceiling, evokes either a recreation room or classical painting studio. Different configurations of shawls are installed there. All of them have a triangle as a base, but some, due to their transformative cross-border journey<sup>15</sup>, are partly stitched together, keeping the memory of the previous experience. These shawls, now more than utilitarian objects, serve as mediators to the world of magic. My graduation piece activates their power through performative mediation. Cultural mediation, according to Carmen Moersh is a tool not only for institutional development, but for *art-making*<sup>16</sup> as well.

Color plays a crucial role. Over the last two years my mother and I have been deconstructing the colours of recycled yarn threads made of unravelled second-hand jumpers. Since most of them were faded due to time and age, our main challenge was how to bring vibrance back to the threads. We tried different magical strategies of plant dye revitalisation. However, it turned out that there was no need for dye – combinations of complementary colours brightened the palette and gave the material a new life.

Handling, hugging and stroking the knitted pattern and pulling and purling thread relieves stress. There is something special about the handmade for the multitude. Thus, playing around with different combinations of the threads, we revealed the healing aspects of their materiality.

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14 It's important to emphasise our roles are different – she was unravelling jumpers and knitting. Due to the distance between us I never shared my research and artistic approach with her. However, despite the gaps in verbal communication, thread plays the role of mutual connection and support in our relationship.

15 Here, I recount a personal experience from December 2023, when I had the opportunity to bring shawls to Oslo. To circumvent potential border inquiries I decided to stitch them together, creating one large blanket.

16 Carmen Moersch, ed. *Time for Cultural Mediation*. Zurich University of the Arts and Pro Helvetia, published online at [www.kultur-vermittlung.ch/zeit-fuer-vermittlung](http://www.kultur-vermittlung.ch/zeit-fuer-vermittlung) (accessed April 28, 2024), 47–49.





## Conclusion

In my master's work, I trace a recycled thread that has passed through the hands of many women over generations and various contexts, primarily through handicrafts. This journey has led my work to embrace an immaterial turn, where collectivity surpasses commodity. Thus the shift from craft to witchcraft took place, giving rise to the *Art and Witchcraft Department* as a nomadic hub of material and immaterial connections. Looking at it from Federici's perspective, it is literally the same tool: the knitting needle and the magic wand.

It's important to acknowledge my intention to bridge past and current projects. There is no room in this thesis to fully convey the drama behind creating free education hubs. Both in the Nordic countries and Russia, socially engaged art initiatives face precarity or even suppression. This is why it was crucial for me to document this knowledge in written form. I've learned from Nordic initiatives the difference in approach to participatory art practices. Projects that may be perceived as having an artistic agenda in Russia are an important part of daily life in Norway. However, it's crucial to remember that education and social support, devoid of participation, artistic expression, care and healing, can indeed become instruments of separation, segregation and social control. The history of witchcraft demonstrates the complexity of this precarious balance.

This was the first time in our lives that my mother and I worked closely together. Thus we mended generational gaps – the thread connects us despite distance. We created vibrant hand knitted shawls using recycled yarn. These objects became mediators in communication, embodying the collaborative spirit of our work. In my practice, I emphasise art mediation as a means of introducing a broader audience to the principles of participatory art, enriching life with the synergy of creation and social construction.

This thesis stands as a pivotal component within a broader body of work that has been meticulously developed over several years of unwavering dedication and relentless exploration. Through countless hours of research, experimentation and reflection, I have continuously expanded upon my ideas and honed my witchcraft, delving deeper into the intersections of art, academia and societal transformation.







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