

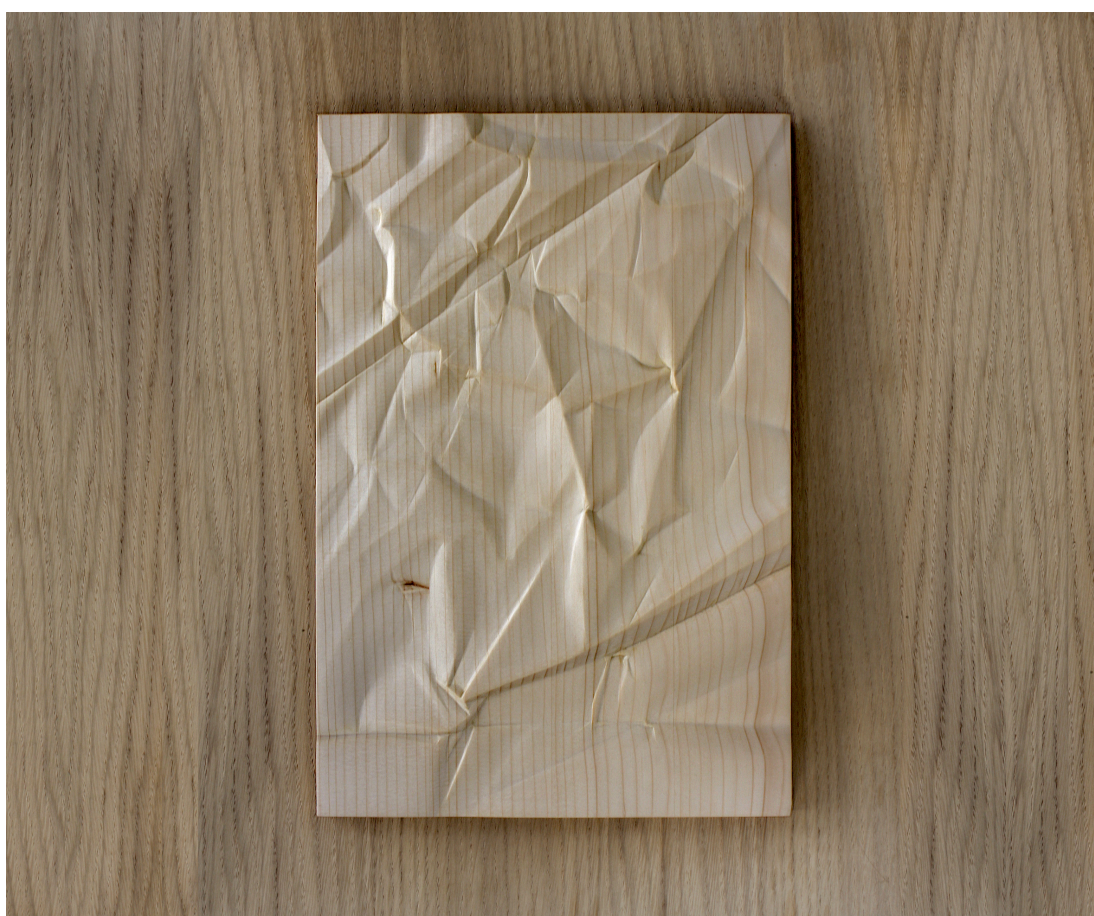


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Rapport för KUF-projektet

EARTHLY MATTERS



Projektet *Earthly Matters* är ett konstnärligt utvecklingsarbete kretsande kring materialitet och materialmässiga tvetydigheter.

Människans förmåga att identifiera och kategorisera material på basen av visuella kännetecken är utgångspunkten för detta projekt. Genom materialutprovningar, skulpturalt arbete och skriftlig reflektion har jag undersökt materialförståelsens gränser med siktet inställt på att skapa former och strukturer där den naturliga igenkänningsprocessen störs och materialiteten självt förblir ett frågetecken. I skulpturala objekt utformade som materialutsnitt eller provbitar har jag letat efter omöjliga eller dubbeltydiga materialuttryck, föremål som demonstrerar en

framtvungad inkonsekvens – trä som veckar sig som papper, glas som spricker som lera, porslin som böjer sig som silikon.

Projektet resulterade i en serie skulpturala verk som ställdes ut på Galleri Format i Oslo (4.10-18.11.2018), samt i tankar och reflektioner presenterade i en föreläsning på AGENDA-seminariet *What is your question?* på Kunstnernes Hus i Oslo 23.11.2018.



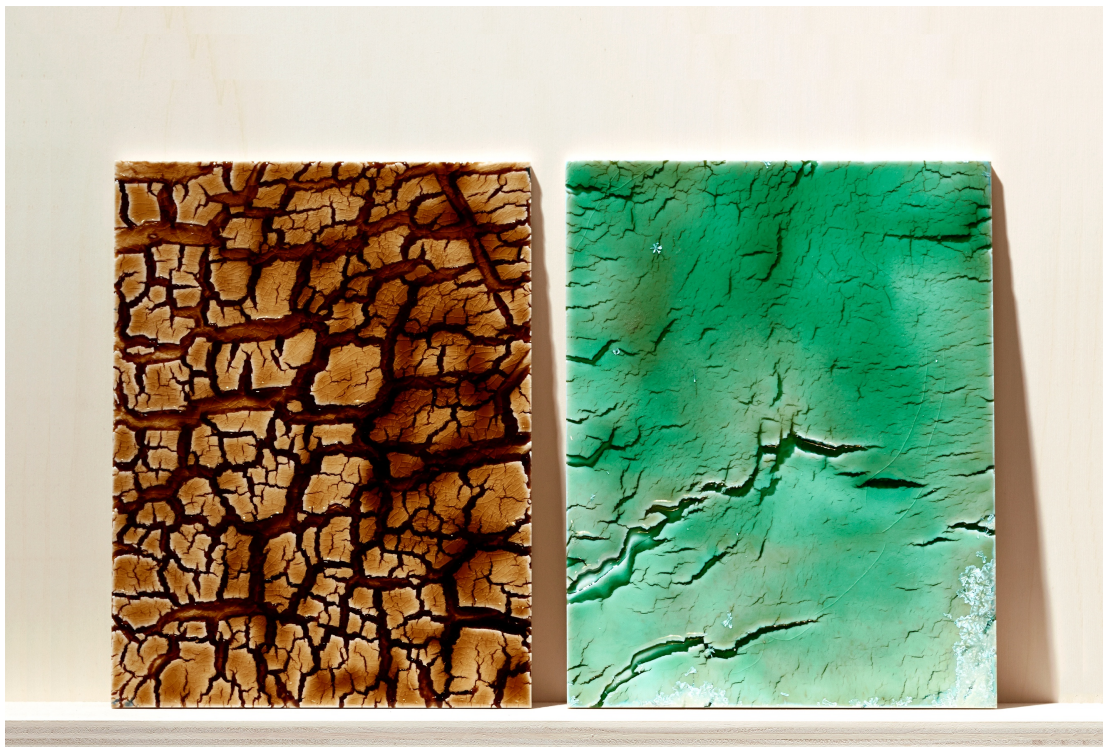
From the series *Pages* (silikon, trä, glaserad keramik), 2017-18



Galleri Format, installationsbild



From the series *Pages*, 2018



From the series *Pages*, 2018

Caroline Slotte

Seminar presentation

AGENDA: *What is your question?*

23. November 2018

Kunstneres Hus, Oslo

In Kassel, outside of the Museum of Natural History, there is a small group of ordinary looking, grey tree trunks. A sign next to the objects reveal that they aren't actually wood, they are made out of petrified wood, stone. They are approximately 20 million years old.

The finest examples of petrified wood are created when a piece of wood is buried in a fine-grained sediment so completely that all contact with oxygen is cut off. Due to this lack of oxygen, the wood cannot rot, instead a slow process begins where the organic material is replaced, cell-by-cell, by dissolved minerals transported there by water. In this process all details of the object, including its interior structures, are preserved; wood grains, growth rings, bark, knotholes and twigs. Somewhere along the way comes a point where the tree is half wood, half stone.

As a child I was one of those who used taste as the primary way of getting to know the world. More often than not on snapshots from when I was little, I have something sticking out of my mouth, a clump of dust, a rock, a candy wrapper. I can vividly remember my mother frantically trying to remove things from my mouth. For a long period, when asked about my plans for the future, I would reply that when I grow up I am going to "make sand castles and clean the spaces between my toes". As for most children, a sensuous interaction with the world was both natural and imperative.

Choosing a life and a profession so thoroughly connected to material explorations must have its roots here. For me, artistic work is not so much about conveying a message or communicating a predetermined concept or narrative. Instead I have come to view my practice as originating in a quite personal need – a profound longing to be in touch with the physical surroundings. To make links between inner and outer realities, between mind and world.

I often work with ceramic materials in different forms, and I often use direct manipulation of found materials to open the objects up for new interpretations, allowing us to see things we would otherwise not have seen. It was at the end of a fairly traditional higher education in ceramics some ten years ago, that I first began to approach the fired ceramic object as a potential raw material. This was for a number of different reasons, partly, a strong wish to enter into a dialogue with a material that spoke back to me more distinctly than clay did at that time, and partly, an attraction of a more physical nature towards working in a hard material, a material that provided resistance.

In my day-to-day artistic work, I make decisions based on focused attention, visual testing and careful observation of these tests. I consider the visual, tactile qualities of the material, along with its conceptual impact. A combination of these two aspects – the sensual and the conceptual – forms the basis for my interest in the field of material-based art.

I get excited about how things feel. I imagine touching things with my gaze, I imagine my fingertips as eyes. I get excited about surface structures and material responses, bending, cracking, folding, peeling, collapsing. I am on the lookout for double signals. Imitations, interpretations, translations, illusions. Borrowed versus made. Natural against fabricated.

A recurring thematic concern revolves around material perception and material recognition. The idea of something unrecognizable, an object that looks like two things at once, resulting in an unsettling state of material confusion. Our understanding of and ability to interpret three-dimensional forms and structures intrigue me. With one glance and seemingly without

hesitation we make definitive decisions concerning the materiality of any given object. Of course, it must have been of utmost importance for the survival of our species to be able to quickly determine whether something is hard or soft, heavy or light, hollow or massive, even though many of these properties cannot be determined through visual examination alone.

So, what happens then we encounter hybrids, materials that aren't consistent, objects whose behaviour doesn't make sense? Is it possible to halt our perception of a given object in its very first phase, the phase where materiality is determined?

Can I make something that looks like two materials at once? What does it take for us to believe that a wooden board has been crumbled up like a piece of paper? How do we react to this material impossibility?

And what happens if you turn the inside out? How skilled are we at reading the negative forms and structures of familiar material surfaces? Take dry clay with its distinctive pattern of cracks – are we able to interpret and identify its negative counterpart or is it viewed as something completely alien, a mystery? The positive-negative shift, so easily performed through various casting techniques in the workshop, seems to present quite a challenge for our perception.

And what about inconsistencies concerning density? What happens if something we normally perceive as a solid, heavy and infinite mass, appears before us as soft and flexible, a thin film of bedrock?

When it comes to raw facts, I know very little about materials, how they originate, the mechanisms and logic behind their existence. The tree trunks in Kassel are for me magic, objects that I cannot completely comprehend and therefore presents an imaginative free-space, an opening where thoughts can expand. Within this realm, my aim is to direct the spot light towards the physical, structural logic of materials by staging situations or creating objects where this logic is disrupted and the visual information fails to make sense.

The fact that materiality has taken on such a central role in my practise has to do with the layers of meanings, nuances and associations that the material as such adds to the work. The voice of the material becomes a parallel voice in the work, sometimes even the lead singer. With this voice I am in constant dialogue. Listening to it, analysing it, adapting it, challenging it. I want to know what the material itself can do, the potential of the material as something with intelligence, a substance that can reveal new insights, that can expand our perception and understanding of the world. For me, material is an aid for thinking and a dialogue partner in a multi-step process. I throw my questions at it, test them out and analyse the answers. If the answer is something unexpected, something puzzling, I am on the right track, I can continue.

I started out by tracing my interest in the material world to early childhood. For a child, material investigations can seem quite straightforward. What is this, how does it behave? How does it taste? Nowadays, I seem to complicate things, trying to find unexpected ways of sensing the world, insisting on complexity. I get bored and push myself in search of something surprising, something different.

Artistic expression is engaged with pre-verbal meanings of the world, meanings that are incorporated and lived rather than simply intellectually understood. [...] [T]he task of art and architecture in general is to reconstruct the experience of an undifferentiated interior world, in which we are not mere spectators, but to which we inseparably belong.

Juhani Pallasmaa, "The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses", 2005

A crucial function of art is that it can move us. Communication at its best entails exactly this, something in our surroundings touches us, reverberates within us.

On some level, my entire artistic practice is driven by attempts to satisfy this desire for connection. Through physical explorations I take in the world, I digest it and process it into something that I can relate to, an object that exists in the world as some kind of extension.

Hence, the questions that I ask myself in my artistic practice are perhaps not really meant to be answered. The investigations are not undertaken in search of actual facts. Instead the questions are there to keep me in motion, to provide a direction and to prompt me to keep trying. The questions propel me into action. I am on a quest, searching for a way to ground myself. Through my making, I confirm my belonging. I anchor myself to the world.



Silikonavgjutning av berggrunden, Helsingfors, september 2018