

Things Dry Fast

A Topography of Walking

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Abstract

Everything here dries fast. Even the acrylic colour dries faster than it does in my home country. The northern climate has changed one perception of time and slowly formed new habits and distinct senses of understanding.

Two movements are performed in parallel to adapt to the environment; a light ball flowing through the body, and the body strolling across the city. They together formed a layout of an unknown place, somewhere between the humid land and the cold climates.

This project explores how walking to the Norwegian landscape has introduced contemporary drawing through cartography and additional interpretations.

Alt her tørker raskt. Til og med akrylfargen tørker raskere enn den gjør i mitt hjemland. Det nordlige klimaet har endret oppfatningen av tid og langsomt dannet nye vaner og distinkte forståelser.

To bevegelser utføres parallelt for å tilpasse seg miljøet; en lett ball som flyter gjennom kroppen, og kroppen som rusler gjennom byen. De danner sammen et kart over et ukjent sted, et sted mellom den fuktige jorden og de kalde klimaene.

Dette prosjektet utforsker hvordan å gå til det norske landskapet introduserer samtidskunst gjennom kartografi og tilleggsfortolkninger.



Theme

"Things Dry Fast : A Topography of Walking" explores the state of "migration" and the "adaptation" it generates during the process of transitioning from one place to another. The questions lie behind the interest of relocation, the discomfort of taking risks, the state of alienation and the steps of overcoming unfamiliarity.

There are reasons people migrate far away from their homelands. The great reasons come with consequences and conditions. No procedures flow smoothly, especially to people who come from afar, very very far. Documentations, regulations, restrictions and authorizations are the first to begin with. The power to authorise where in the globe could a person stay, in which city, country, and continent rely on a thin rope with one hand grabs tightly on one side, and the other barely holds it loosely as if ready to let go any moment. It proves how "life" is not the same everywhere. It is not.

People in every society, in particular ages, go to work in the morning and earn for their living as well as everyone else, however, it is not the same. Concerning the unevaluable concept of "time", for example; the time spent on the street, with certain transportation choices in certain city plans, and the time left to spend on something else, is not equal everywhere. How the administrations govern the very city and propose certain policies to facilitate a flexible city for its citizens to travel back and forth smoothly is not the same. The type of population who believe in certain political party campaigns enough to vote for them is not the same. Educational system which shapes its people to be critical enough to decide sharpened choices for themselves is not the same, everywhere.

One of the reasons for migration can simply be because of "time". Time spent properly travelling across the city, with only footsteps, without being depleted from any other uncontrollable factors, is precious. The will to be embraced and accommodated by a city plan to shape one's own behaviours and habits is unconditionally welcoming and appealing, a habit as simple as walking, for instance.

"Walking", in a well conducted city, is extraordinarily appealing enough for a stranger who has been hesitating to walk to avoid unexpected objects on footpaths and polluted air in home country. Walking, pleasantly introduces the outsider to its foreign city with an aim to mitigate uncertainty and disorientation that the person is facing after arriving to the land.

Resettlement is such a challenging procedure to encounter. One would even wonder if they could ever settle in one particular place at all. And wonder even more if they could ever have that freedom of making such alluring decisions to truly own their autonomy. In order to do so, something could have been missing along the way; relationships, friendships, cultural and social comforts, and other contentment aspects in life. Sacrificion for independence can be heartachingly painful.

Being invisibly tied to specific societal and cultural norms could create ambiguous vast conflicts, especially while experiencing other totally diverse societal and cultural norms. When the two areas are confronting each other, imagine getting stuck between

them, flowing directionless in an empty space without any navigations, not belonging anywhere and getting completely lost. That is what “reverse culture shock” does to people who are misplaced. It creates an internal void as a punishment from the inability to settle and adapt to certain environments.

My father, however, has an idea of where I should settle. Beside internal conflict to fill the void I unintentionally created, I apparently form a gentle conflict with the person who adores me with all the best wishes. The empty-borderless void, a dilemma void as I call it, then grows bigger and bigger until evacuation sounds like an ideal way out.

An exit could stand right behind the eyes of a person who was too baffled to see. In this case, it is the “light ball”. A light ball is the tale my father told me when I was young to cope with sleepless nights, to imagine a light ball appearing in the body and consciously letting it flow through different parts, as a meditation technique to stay in the present moment, which I still practise on a daily basis.

The light ball would not only endure the body through sleepless nights, but it could also endure the body through breaking the void and the lack of direction. Together with walking, they could walk the body out, from the bodyscape to the landscape, and create a guidance, or a map of some kind, to navigate the very stranger in becoming familiar with the land again. Not just any land, since no land is the same.



Background & Context

My previous educational background is in visual arts, and I worked as an educator before starting the master programme. My works circulate around the reflections and observations of relationships, both with self and others, together with memories. I usually initiate the projects with texts alongside sketches, then exploring various techniques and materials, which later influence the writing and possible outcome back and forth. I tend to pay strong attention to colour selections as well.

I have been developing a **systematic approach** as a main project driven process since the second semester. Started in Method1: Context, when I began a project with the idea of breaking habituated routines in often controlling concrete outcomes from the beginning. The aim was to experiment on a different approach with as little or none possibility of manipulation as possible and let the technique and material guide the process. This approach has been applied and influenced my practice continuously since then.



Fig.1 Experimental collage sketchbook, 2023

In order to lose the control, material and technique had to be simple and stable, therefore, collaging with paper has been brought in. "Randomness" was the key in every step of the experiment, including colour selection, shape forming, ordering, and grouping. The outcome turned out to be unexpectedly free and it has unleashed a wider approach to the following projects. The experiment was also an exploration in **spacing**, both positive and negative, which can be applied for texts, images, and other elements.

As seen later in "**Spring Book**", an adaptation from Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" made with letterpress printing and collage during Studio2. It stated the conversation between two people on going through turbulence during seasonal changes and awaiting for the warmer days. Spacing plays a significant role in the piece since shapes and texts had the correlation of meaning to one another.

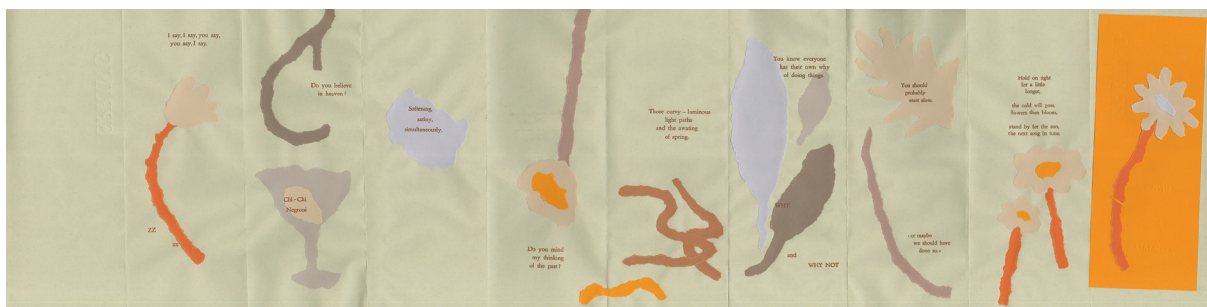


Fig.2 Spring Book, 2023

Moreover, the piece was published in editions, so the system of making multiple collages has been created together with **labelling**. Shapes are named and numbered indicating types of paper, directions, and in which pages they are in. The system enables the piece to be comfortable and concisely remade and, on the other hand, act as an **analogy guidance** for the original prototypes.

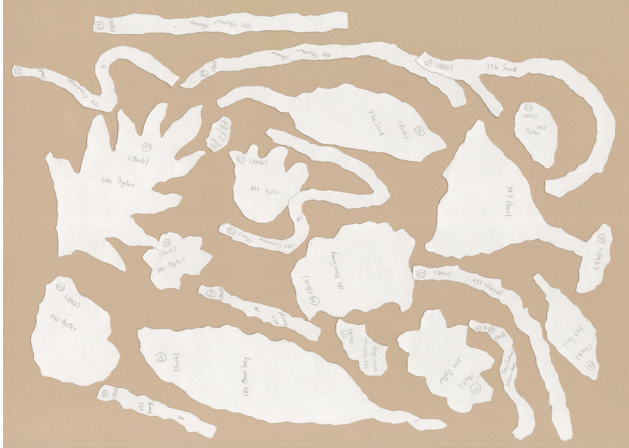


Fig.3 Collage prototype with labels

Not only spacing, but **the interaction with space** also interests me. The space surrounding texts and images, either in printed or digital matters, provide an open space for the readers, viewers, and maker to interpret on their own. Especially with books, during the Experiment course, I created a mock up of **"Blank Book"** to examine the space within the page margin that remains for the reader to hold.

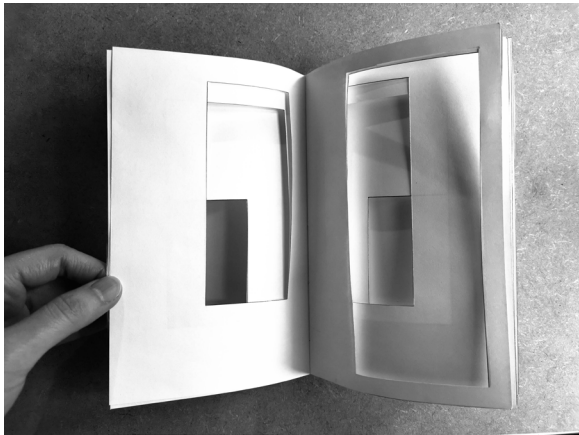


Fig.4 Blank Book, 2023

The Blank Book was an initial prototype for a book with texts and images in Studio3, in which I interpreted texts and space through **drawings**. One specific page margin format was brought in use, but it provided restriction to the drawings instead (fig.5). The rearranging text, according to the **"concrete poetry"** was then introduced, which benefited the drawing interpretation to be more expressive and free (fig.6).



Fig.5 Texts in fixed format with drawings

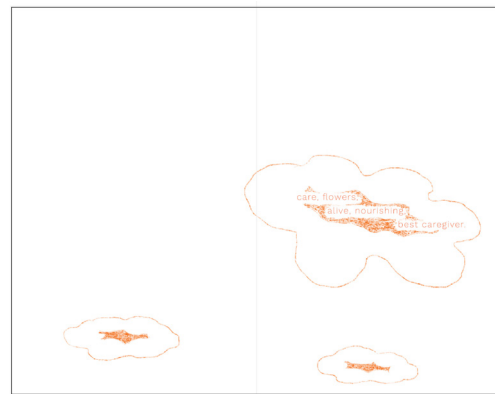


Fig.6 Texts in loose format with drawings

Not only simple monotone drawings, the digital full coloured drawings were employed (fig.7). However, the importance of text has been questioned. Some messages are meant to be perceived differently, not necessarily to always be visible, but heard. **“Sound”** or voiceover was then inserted instead of text (fig.8).

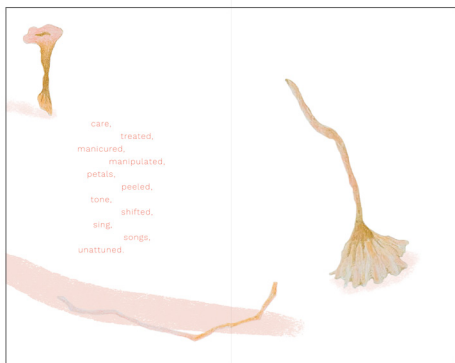


Fig.7 Texts with coloured drawings

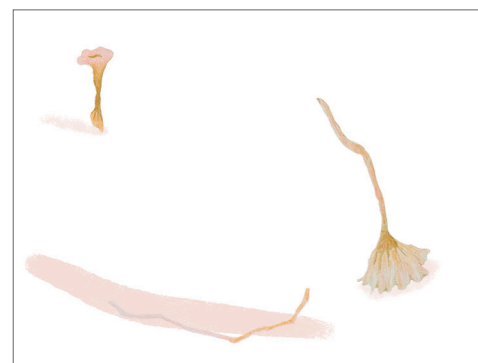


Fig.8 Drawing with voiceover

The final result was a video consisting of 30 drawings with a voiceover called **“Gardener”**. I recorded my voice reading my own text on crystallising the experience of reverse culture shock with symbolization; implying the mind as a garden to be taken care of.

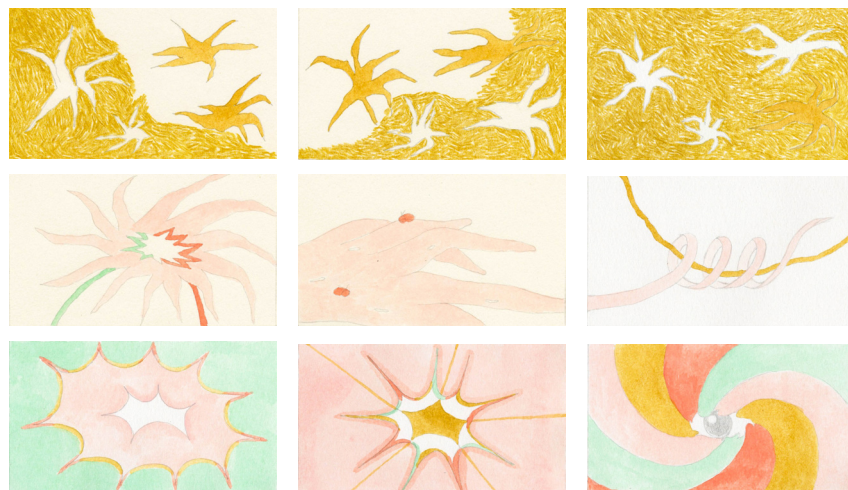


Fig.9 Gardener, 2023

Working with visuals and sounds curious me on the relations between them; without vision but sound, what can one see, and for the contrary as well. Therefore, I did an experiment with drawing and sound, for essay writing in Theory class. The experiment procedures, which act as an **environmental observation**, include going for a walk across the city and recording sounds from different areas, paying attention to the surroundings while carrying an act of **walking** as a **meditation**, seating at one spot and drawing from the occurring sound without looking, and recording sound from the same spot but listening to it at home and creating a drawing after.

According to the on-site drawing (fig.10), a **drawing system** has been created to resemble a **map** (fig.11). The page has been divided into sections and directions: north, south, east, and west. I situate myself in the centre of the page space, and construct every line I draw based on the source directions where the sound comes from and differentiate the sources of sound with colours. For example, brown refers to the background sound which has low volume (fig.12).



Fig.10 Drawing on site at Oslo central station

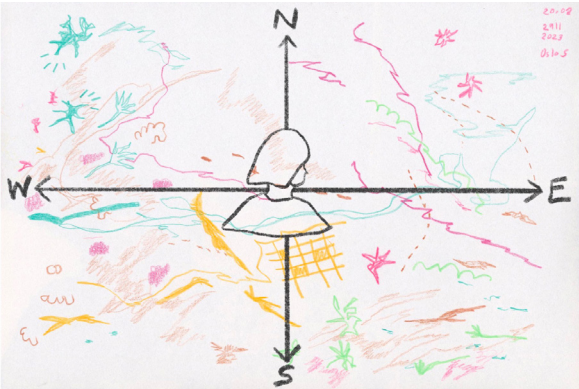


Fig.11 Map of the drawing based from direction



Fig.12 The intensity of brown colour based on sounds volume



Fig.13 Drawing from the sound recorded

The drawing from listening to recorded sound (fig.13), on the other hand, has recalled visual memory during the recording moment. Colour means solely for aesthetic purpose, shapes and lines are bold and hollow, illustrating how the memories are not detail oriented but mainly focus on the movement of the circumstances.

The significant factors that influence the drawings between two different experiments are space, place, and time, especially with sound relevances. Sound that has been recorded and sound listening at an actual place stimulate one's perception discreetly; recorded sound has no depth or width that could anticipate the sense of space and place where it belongs but only the attention to high or low volume, while sound that one experiences on site is surrounded with panoramic senses of space and direction.

In addition, the experiment also investigated the "perception of truth"; questioning which drawing among the two are legitimate, and how truth, memories, and experiences are overlapping one another while one perceives certain circumstances.

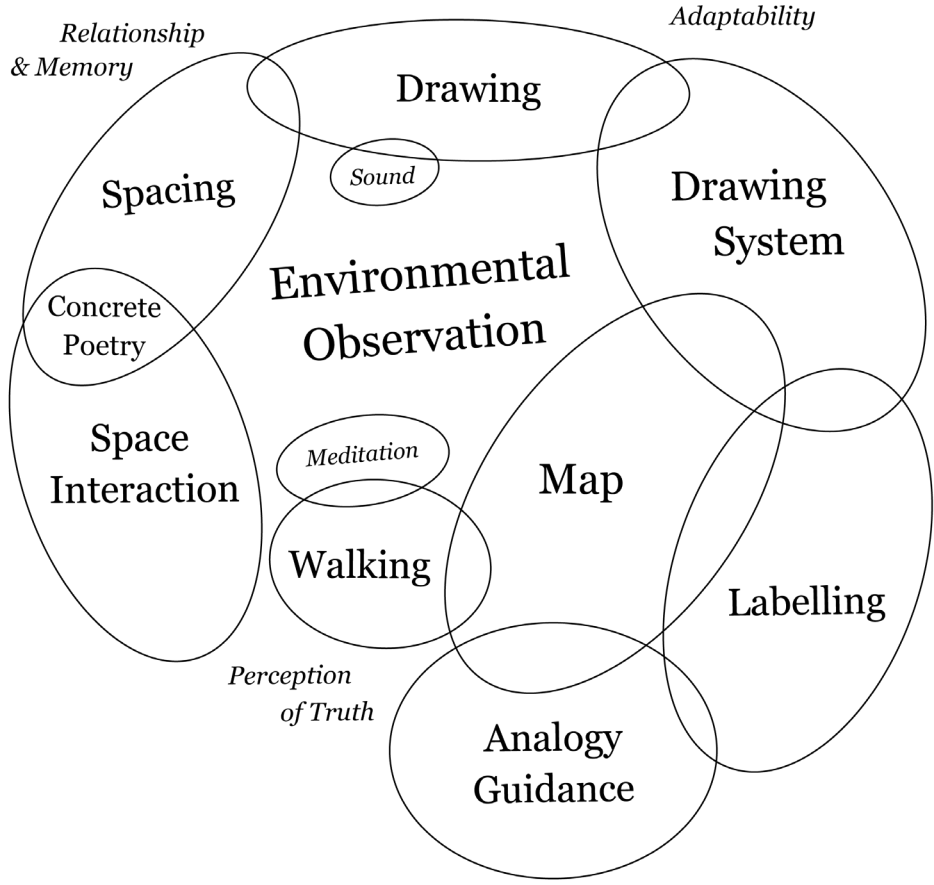


Fig.15 Contextual approach in past projects

According to past projects, various approaches have been investigated and explored constantly (fig.15) in order to conceptualise the development of each task. Considering certain techniques and materials suit certain specific projects better, some approaches get to continue developing while some await for more suitable ideas or projects in the future, working with sound, for example.

References

Since the project is about the journey to achieve a certain destination, “getting lost” was common in the initial process. The journey then required some guidance, or navigation, *the Polynesian wayfinding*, for example. The ancient polynesian established a sophisticated navigation system (fig.16), which lied on deep observation and understanding of natural signs; the stars, the ocean swells, the flight patterns of birds, etc., to find their way over the open ocean. Their tradition is embedded in using human senses and pattern-finding skills to figure out where one is, and where one might be going.



Fig.16 Polynesian Wayfinding 101

Relevance to the previous essay that mentioned thoughts on walking, and the final project initiated from the walk, a book “*Walking on Thin Air*” by Geoff Nicholson helps elaborating broader reflections on the act. In the book (fig.17), Geoff mentioned many walkers, including himself, who encountered unexpected situations and how the circumstances led to speculations and events.

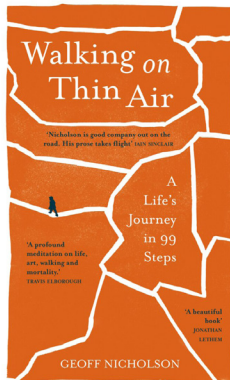


Fig.17 “Walking on Thin Air” by Geoff Nicholson



Fig.18 “Barking dogs” map in “Everything Sings: Map of Narrative Atlas” by Denis Wood

The navigating systems and maps were also discussed in the book, especially on maps that are unusual. He referred to Denis Wood, a cartographer who stated that a map is solely an argument and idea of something, not an actual representation. One of Denis’s books “*Everything Sings: Map of Narrative Atlas*” collected maps of several arguments in one neighbourhood; houses whose front yards have no fences, traffic signage for strangers in the local area, pipeline systems, and a “*Barking dog*” map (fig.18) made by a postman, for example.

Denis Wood. (2010). *Barking dog*. Deniswood.
<https://www.deniswood.net/books-everythingSings.htm>

Geoff Nicholson. (2023). *Walking on Thin Air*. Saqi Books.

Hannah Hillam. (2019). *Wayfinding 101*. BYU Magazine.
<https://magazine.byu.edu/article/how-far-shell-go/>

Conceptual approach in graphic design is the field that I enjoy exploring and want to develop furthermore. A design collective *“Ruja Press”* (2012-2022) has a very inspiring conceptual approach in publications and installations based on the members’ background, Ruohong Wu and José Quintanar, as architect and artist. Especially with *“A Dutch Landscape 1”* (fig.19), a publication of 24 pages containing simple lines and shapes which slightly changed and evolved from the first page to the last. It adopted the dutch drawing games into indicating the manipulative approaches in the history of colonisation.

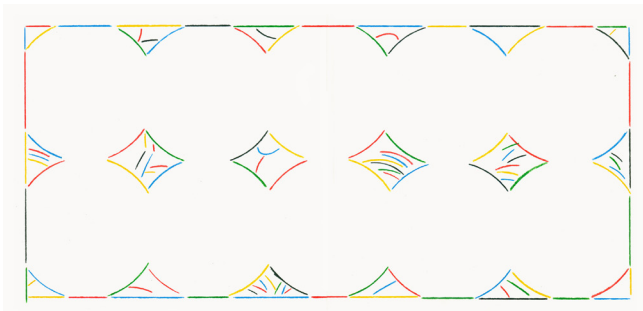


Fig.19 *“A Dutch Landscape 1”*, 2019, Ruja Press



Fig.20 Sabine Finkenauer's artworks

Moreover, **Sabine Finkenauer's** geometric artworks inspired me aesthetically. She uses simple everyday subjects and shapes to create abstract expression pieces characterised by their minimalism and the use of vivid colours (fig.20).

In addition to the making of maps, the outline drawing of objects on a table in Daniel Spoerri's *“An Anecdoted Topography of Chance”* (fig.21), has provoked me for the possibilities to present and interpret. Daniel traced all 80 objects, numbered, described their visual appearances, etc. and noted additional anecdotes to the objects, such as the circumstances they used to be put in or how they ended up on the table.

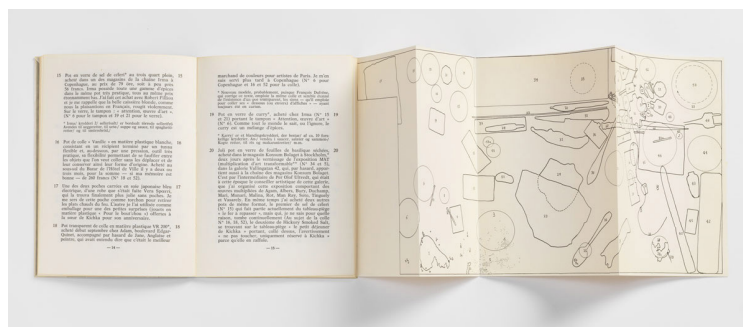


Fig.21 *“An Anecdoted Topography of Chance”* by Daniel Spoerri

All in all, the final project concerns the navigation structures as a lead and dives into the influence of walking with an aesthetic manner. It adopts the idea of mapmaking along with certain elaboration rules and systems, as well as approaching the design process with conceptual thinking.

Daniel Spoerri. (1962). *Topographie anecdotée du Hasard*. Galerie Lawrence.

Ruja Press. (2019, May). *A Dutch Landscape 1*. Josequintanar. <https://www.josequintanar.com/-un-paisaje-holands>

Sabine Finkenauer. (2023, January 14). Untitled. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/sabinefinkenauer/>

Method

The first intention before starting the final project was the urge to embrace “drawing” in, and secondly, was to have the project *engaged* with people in some ways. As relevant to previous practices, some approaches that worked and seem to provide potential in developing and driving the project forward have been adopted. The following mind map (fig.22) indicates how the project has been put together in the end.

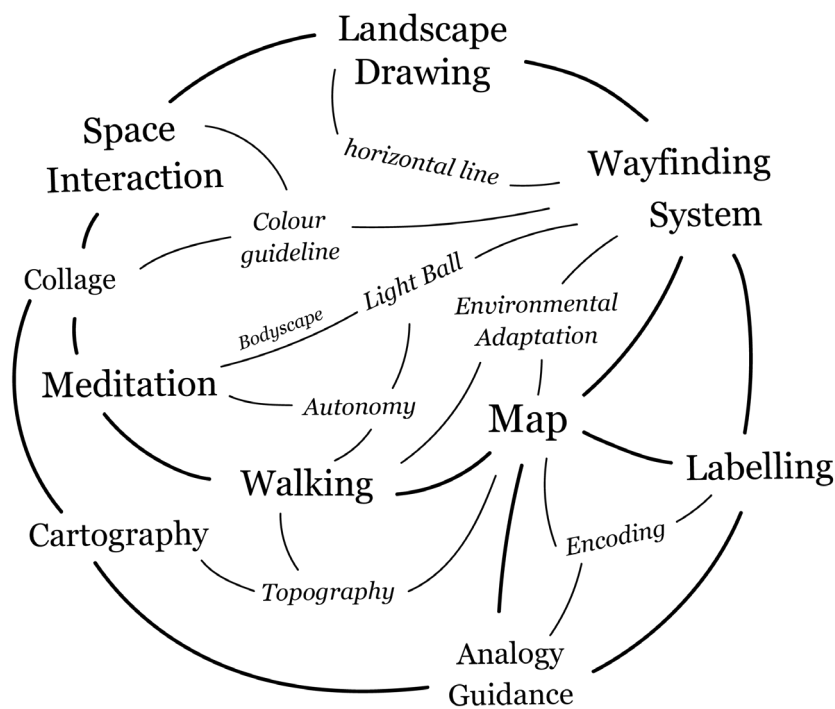


Fig.22 Contextual approaches and methods for final project

In the beginning, I tried to depict which storytelling approaches suitably tell the story of a light ball. A picture book has been brought up (fig.23), but it could not accommodate the overall layers of the project completely. After that, a painting with cutouts was made to test building more complexity (fig.24). Combining the two might make it work, but something was lacking, so I did a felted wool depicting the characteristic of a light ball which is light, bright, and soft (fig.25).



Fig.23 An attempt of making picture book



Fig.24 A test with gouache painting and cutouts

Fig.25 Felted wools for light balls to depict its character

The process seemed to go directionless, therefore, the wayfinding system has been brought to guide the drawing process, to figure out where the project is and could go. The system includes four elements: light ball, horizontal line, limited colour selections, and the "landscape".

Light ball - refers to the coping mechanism to conflict of being unsettled, and longing for independence. It can also refer to the sun, the brightness as light as homeland that has been missing, and could somehow represent myself.

Horizontal line - an invisible line that appears tirelessly in the landscape. It puts everything in order and makes sense; when photographing in parallel to the line, it is credible.

Limited colour selections - intend to provide the project as less distraction as possible since I personally tend to pick several colours simultaneously.

Landscape - is what Norwegian natural sightseeing provides the richest. The landscapes brought in the project scoped to one that has been experienced from the walk, with subject matters provided: mushrooms, tree saps, frozen lakes, etc.

After having guidelines, the sketches then appeared to be potentially progressive (fig.26-27).

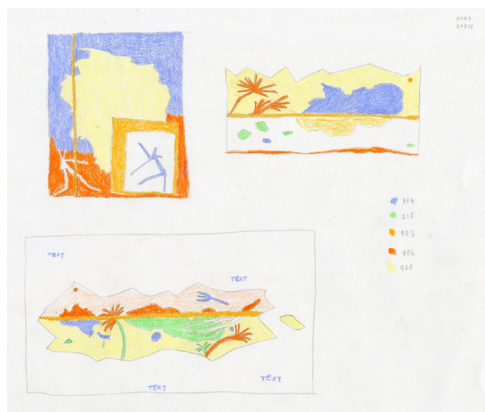


Fig.26-27 Sketches for drawings

To produce the drawing according to the sketches, some reproductions have been made. It scaled the sketch up using gouache technique, however, it could not represent the freshness and originality of lines and shapes caused by limitation and restraint (fig.28-29). Also gouache provides diverse characteristics compared to colour pencils.



Fig.28-29 Gouache painting resembling sketches

At this point, colour pencils have been brought back in. Three first drawings were then made with certain colour selections according to the guidelines (fig.30-31).

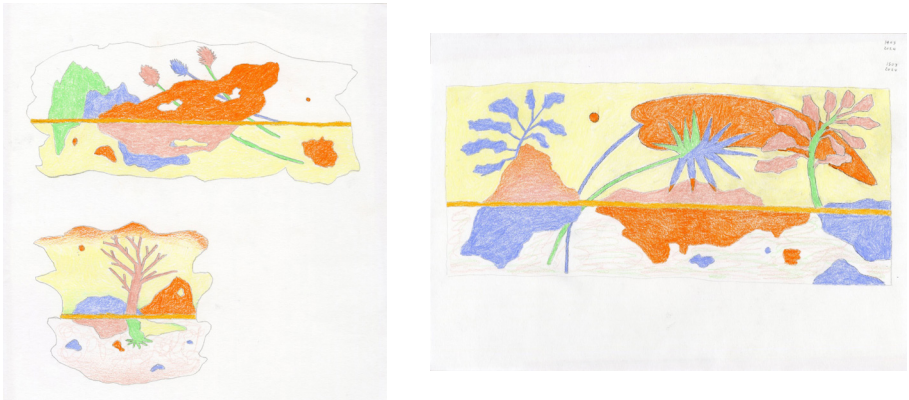


Fig.30-31 Drawings with colour pencils

The cutout technique in the beginning has engaged in making an experimental collage. The drawings were photocopied in 1:1 scale, shapes were cut out and grouped by colours (fig.32).



Fig.32 An experimental collage

According to the “Barking dog” map, the discussion of what could be a map has been challenged. I then wondered if the collage made from drawing could be a representation or a depiction of something (fig.33). To test the idea, the collage has been scaled up using acrylic colour on paper, and installed on the wall (fig.34).



Fig.33 Sketch for a possibility of collage on wall



Fig.34 A test for wall installation

The wall installation result tended to work with the idea of mapmaking, however, all the drawing collections that have been made need some kind of documentation. In consequence, a book with printed drawings and cutouts, using different papers transparency has been made as a test (fig.35-36).



Fig.35-36 A mockup book documented drawing collections

The book showed great possibilities to be a suitable drawing archive, however, multiple layers of techniques and materials could perform a micro distraction to the essence of the drawings themselves. I then looked for a simpler representation approach, like an ordinary map on one single sheet, so a mockup map of drawings has been laid out, printed and folded (fig.37).



Fig.37 A mockup single map with drawings

As a result, the simplicity quality of the single maps provides spaces for the holder to interpret the drawings. On the other hand, I aimed to associate connections between the drawing and the collage as well, using the printed map as a guidance. Therefore, the documentation will be expanded, not only to collect drawings, but also to depict relations between fragmented components that form a map.

Process

Beside embracing the wayfinding system that was a huge leading path to the project, sticking with colour pencils (fig.38-39) makes a significant outstanding outcome as well since they provide vibrant pigments and accommodate the flexibility of time and place to produce the drawing, which created the flow state in the process.



Fig.38-39 Drawings with colour pencils

Moreover, the labelling system has contributed in expanding layers and depth for the project narrative. As seen in the process of scaling a collage into wall installation, numbers and signs are labelled to indicate the position to be placed and differentiate categories of each piece from one another (fig.40-41).



Fig.40-41 Labelling system from collage to wall installation

Another significant breaking point is welcoming physical space to the project upon wall installation. The spaces between the wall and where the viewers stand play an invisible relational factor to the interpretation of the project as well (fig.42).

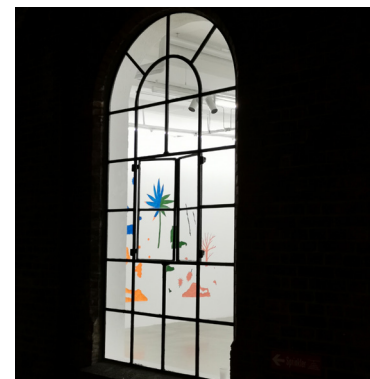


Fig.42 The wall installation view from afar

Furthermore, slight changes approche when handling materials could generate different impact as well, paper folding and binding techniques, for example. In the first mockup book for documentation, the centre page was bound with an asymmetrical foldable printed drawing, which created an interactive engagement with the reader

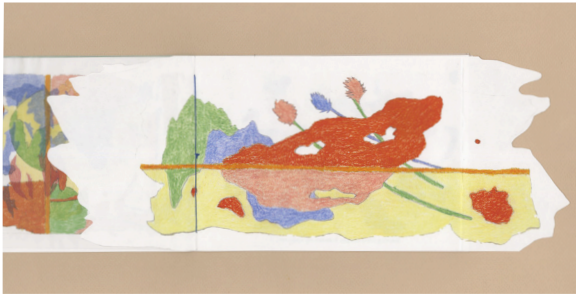


Fig.43 Foldable page in the book

Also in the book, the text of two notions has been placed randomly with different colours (fig.44), has unintentionally composed an interaction between the two conversations, bodyscape vs. landscape, together. It opens up the possibilities of layout directions and the impact each arrangement could create.



Fig.44 Two conversations engaging one another

In addition, the folded map that has been tested print provides a sensible reaction for the reader. When flipping and turning it around back and forth (fig.45) generates a playful approach to interpret the project, which is what I was ideally hoping for.



Fig.45 Folded map

Result

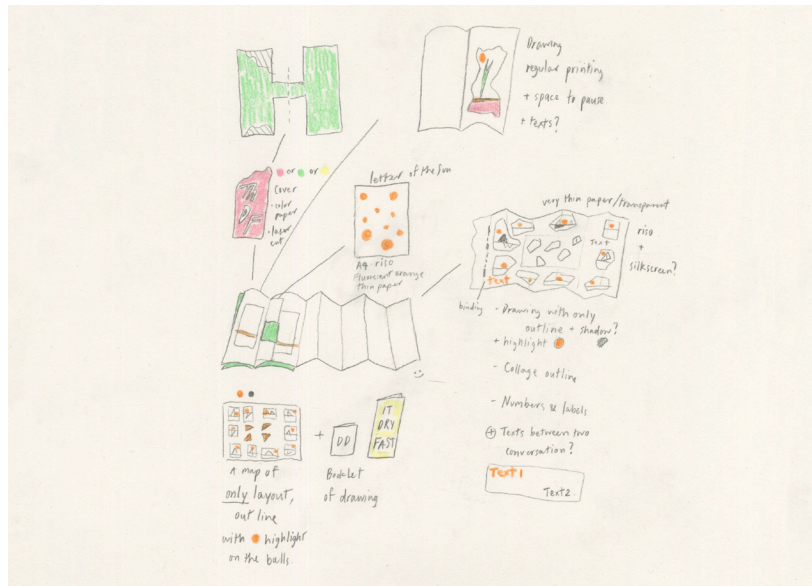


Fig.45 Sketches for the result of the project

The project includes collections of drawings as an initial result, and the drawings will be presented in two different outcomes;

1. A wall installation from a collage made with all the drawings (fig.46)
2. Publications as documentation for the drawings, consisting of three printed matters, which can be both separated and bound together in one piece;
 - a) A book of drawing collections (fig.47-49)
 - b) A letter of the sun, a collage from light balls in drawings (fig.50)
 - c) A guide map to navigate the wall installation (fig.51)



Fig.46 Wall installation



Fig.47-48 A book of drawing collections



Fig.49 A book of drawing collections



Fig.50 A letter of the sun



Fig.51 A guide map to navigate the wall installation

Learning outcome

Since the start of the project, I've noticed the systematic thinking pattern that occurred and used them to create the workflow. I've learned to be open to possibility and dare to try even the unpredictable is scary, but both success and failure contribute something to the process.

I learned that techniques sometimes guide the ideas, and what has been done but did not work in the past might work in the present. I learned to trust the process and be precise and concrete when making choices.

In addition, reading and researching are crucial, and being open to talk to people in different fields, listening to their reflections and advice might be challenging but could lead the project further, and to enjoy every step!

