all assembly required.

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art

Juliane Foronda
Spring 2018
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abstract:

This text is composed of stories, lists, quotes, journal entries, poems, questions, propositions, and there are sometimes answers, too. It slips, it’s transient, and it’s modular. And sometimes it might make you laugh. It’s literal in an illogical way; there’s a lot of space here. And I urge that you take a breath between the words. This is not a supplementary or supporting text, but it stands independently, so proceed with time and trust.
all assembly required.

Can you stay just a little bit longer?
Acknowledgments

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I would also like to offer this text to LW, who showed me the importance of words and wording, and who continues to teach me beyond her time.
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Epilogue: *notes on the work*
how to begin
If I were to define my work through 5 concepts, they’d be:

Support
Structure
Intimacy
Object
Nonsense
This text will attempt to dissect, inspect, uncover and (re)discover these five concepts as if they were tangible objects. I intend for this text to shed light on how they run parallel with my experiences as an art-maker, along with the many ebbs and flows of my practice.

My personal experience with these concepts brings forward many questions:

- Who is supporting and who is supported?
- What holds you?
- Where are you at rest?
- When is something functional?
- Why is it that we are so often quickest to neglect caring for ourselves?
- And how much of someone can (should) you hold without having them entirely?

If my sculptures, which I often refer to as constructions, can lead me closer to answering one or more of these questions in their entirety, I’d feel as though they exist with purpose.

Patti Smith speaks of the various facets and experiences of love and loving in such a candid way that she is able to guide me into experiencing love as best as I can without feeling her exact loves for myself. She speaks of that shift from fear into trust\(^1\) with such sensitivity; you must fall in trust before you fall in love. Her words make me reconsider what it means to truly love unconditionally. The kind of love that finds itself preserved in writing is the kind that most of us covet: raw, intense, visceral. You have to be vulnerable enough to love that fiercely, and even more vulnerable to share your story with the world. This book goes beyond her love for Robert, but extends into her love of art and art-making, of music and of New York City; it’s about this all-encompassing, all-consuming love. Her story instills the importance of loving as an action, and how the action of loving can offer a sense of structure even at the most unstable times.

I wonder if you can fall as deeply in love with objects as you can with people. Perhaps this is my love story about the places, spaces, objects and materials that forge the path for my practice to fall in and out of.

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\(^1\) This passage in *Just Kids* is recounting the first night that Patti Smith and Robert Mapplethorpe spent together. She spoke about how feeling fear is necessary in order to love. Patti Smith, *Just Kids*, 2012, 40.
how to care (support)
Countless lessons from *Mister Rogers’ Neighbourhood* are etched into my headspace from my childhood. A household name in most North American homes, Mr. Rogers led by example on what it means to love as an action and was focused on shaping the minds of children by teaching them kindness, patience and integrity while also continuing to advocate for justice, equality and accessibility of knowledge in the public broadcasting sphere. Fred Rogers was my first encounter with endurance art before I even knew what it was. Using his own self as a unit of measure, he maintained the weight of love, 143 lbs for the last 30 years of his life.² He continues to teach us in his death about the meaning and implication of love and loving, and that in order to be able to love others, we must first love ourselves.

I believe that to love is to care, so in order to step into the action of loving, one must first have the willingness and empathy to care. Jan Verwoert states that caring has no limits and that its conditions are unconditional.³ Perhaps there’s more pain and failure involved in caring than we often let ourselves believe. The grace that comes with learning to care exists when you also learn how to entirely forgive even though your heart may still remember. Care is often shattered by silence or ambivalence, meaning that the action of care is to not be indifferent⁴. Though this notion may sound absurd to some, I prefer to think that this mentality is extremely liberating when I begin to dissect what it really means to care. We often depend too much on other people for it. Inherently, we can only give so much, yet the act of caring is an unconditional and limitless commitment.⁵ Over time I have learned that to care and to help are not mutually exclusive. While similar in nature, they are not synonymous. Caring is the feeling that also often leads towards the action of helping, essentially the act of offering services or resources in order to improve a situation, as well as paying attention to or having consideration for others. But who is to say when one is truly helping? Sometimes helping is no longer helping: you can’t help those who don’t want this service from you. That said, can you truly help if you don’t care?

I spent this past summer at Hospitalfield⁶ in Arbroath, Scotland. This is likely one of the most extravagant places that I will ever live. Upon returning to Reykjavík months after this experience, I got to thinking if the strength and comfort that I felt was actually present, or if I was imposing my needs onto this space out of overwhelming desperation. Essentially, my need for support at that given time was as big as Hospitalfield’s estate. I believe support to be the action of carrying (taking on) a weight or burden – be that emotional, physical or conceptual. Support exists in the space between surviving and thriving, maintaining and sustaining; basically to care for something or someone enough to hold them up safely. In order to support, you must have strength, and strength greatly benefits from both consistency and

⁴ Verwoert, 167.
⁵ Verwoert, 168.
⁶ Originally a hospital built to receive pilgrims that were travelling to Arbroath Abbey, the estate eventually became the home to Elizabeth Fraser (heiress of Hospitalfield House) and her artist husband, Patrick Allan following their marriage in 1843. Today, the estate is managed by a small and dedicated team with its focus being primarily in contemporary arts, as well as interdisciplinary projects, education, culture and heritage. Hospitalfield facilitates various artist residencies, public projects, and commissioned works, welcoming artists and creatives from Scotland and abroad. ‘History and Collections – Hospitalfield’, accessed 4 November 2017, http://hospitalfield.org.uk/about/collections/.
empathy. I see the two working in unison, as consistent support, awareness and stability are fundamental to maintaining strength and are all facets that are concerned with empathy. This continues to reign true in a purely literal and structural way. Take a wall frame for instance: the studs stand at every 24 inches, ensuring the integrity and ability for the wall to remain standing.

I see strength to be most evident when it is not flaunted (or hidden behind drywall). While strength can be measured in various ways, I believe that the most powerful form of it is emotional strength. Were these structures really supporting me to the fullest extent of the word, or was I misinterpreting the utter grandeur of Hospitalfield’s front gates for big arms reaching out to hold me? Do we romanticize places and objects to fit what we need them to be for us at that time, or can walls, doors and floors offer us comfort in a similar way as a human can? Can humans be trusted to be stable structures of care?

“Am I an artist or just a hopeless romantic? Because I never meant to be either.”

When I felt too weak, the walls showed me how to stand upright. When I needed to be held up, the lush carpets, they caught me. The refectory chairs, my spring-filled bed that formed to my figure, the slouchy red couches in the courtyard room – they supported me and I looked onto them for how to understand how to move forward when it was too complicated to rationalise it on pure feeling alone.

Forms of care, forms of repair: If the walls can stand, so can I.

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7 This analogy was inspired by Rupi Kaur’s dedication in Milk & Honey that reads: “To the arms that hold me.” Rupi Kaur, Milk and Honey (Kansas City, Missouri: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015).

8 From a conversation with Ash Moniz when we were travelling together in the Philippines, 2015.
16 July, 2017: It’s a feeling like no other, to walk barefoot in grass. I didn’t think I would miss it as much as I have. It’s nice when you can feel a colour so intensely. I’ve always let myself think that I was extra special for being born on Earth Day⁹. Green has always been my favourite colour to see. It’s the most peaceful, and my eyes rest so nicely on patches of it. It’s the best smelling colour, too: the scent of life. Our eyes see the most shades of it, you know. It’s nice when intuition is backed up with fact.

Maybe this is why I tend to cry most in the greenhouse. The ceiling slopes the same way as the arm of the person beside you in bed does when they hold you. This space hugs me so much that I’m willing to stay here in the darkness. (I’m a little bit cold but I’ll pretend I’m not). Here, I can be alone and feel cared for simultaneously. The greenhouse is now filled with shades of black and blue. The roses climbing up on the stone walls are still bright pink though. I’ll stay until it’s all black.

⁹ 22 April
Night fades into day, and the moon trades with the sun. 

*warmth is resting* (again and again) 
Be we never forget the wonder of looking up 
and noticing a few more stars in the sky.

*A certain darkness is needed to see the stars.*

I’ve learned that sometimes you just need to give into the inherent properties of the spaces and objects that surround you to hold you up when you are unable to do so independently. Their mere proximity enables them to support since they are literally and physically there to support. I found myself embodying characteristics of Hospitalfield the longer that I inhabited it. All the hidden spaces of the house instilled in me the importance of considering things far beyond face value, as they emphasized the necessity of stepping into all of the unknowns that I am constantly faced with and to allow myself to take all the time and space that I need. If I never opened the door at the back of the library, I would have never found the stairs leading to the turret where I watched many sunsets in solitude. I’ve never felt so comfortable in such an opulent place. It’s within this home where I learned how to trust again.

Slipping, sloped, slowly (slowing down). 
Colours may change but the contours, they rest eventually. 
It’s urgent and unclear. *If it’s holding you, what’s holding me?* 
The answer does not seem as relevant as the time it takes to respond.

*The shape of the space between us* is an intervention onto the vantage points with and within the space of Galleri Bokboden.

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10 The title of Laurel Woodcock’s 2013 exhibition at MKG127, Toronto. 
12 Excerpt from a letter from Roula Partheniou that I was given before moving to Iceland which advised me to “Embrace all of the unknowns that [I am] stepping into on Tuesday, and keep making room for them as [I] navigate [my] life as an artist.”, August 2016 
13 The Library of Hospitalfield 
14 Excerpt from the accompanying text to my exhibition *The shape of the space between us* in Bergen, Norway. 
15 My solo exhibition at Galleri Bokboden in Bergen, Norway, where I covered all the gallery windows with glue. Renovated from a second-hand bookshop in 2011, Galleri Bokboden is an exhibition space in the Center of Bergen, Norway setup and run by students from University of Bergen’s Faculty of Art and Design. ‘Galleri Bokboden’, accessed 10 December 2017, http://galleribokboden.net/about.
[figure 1] Test of glue on windows (detail), studio (Listaháskóli Íslands), Reykjavík, Iceland. Personal photograph by author. 28 September 2017

[figure 2] The shape of the space between us. (detail, inside). Galleri Bokboden, Bergen, Norway. Personal photograph by author. 1 December 2017
30 November, 2017: As I’m covering the windows with a veil of wood glue, I begin to notice how many eyes are on me. Some for just a second, and others choose to watch for a while. This is becoming an unintentional performance. This tension of the interior versus exterior gaze is curious and I want to challenge it, so I make eye contact with some of these strangers. If they keep their gaze, I usually let a small smirk slip as an acknowledgement that we are no longer entirely strangers anymore before I turn my focus back to gluing.

But the space heater doesn’t work and my hands are tired, frozen and sticky, so I go to the coffee shop across the street to warm up and steal Wi-Fi. As I’m sitting by the big windows with my hands wrapped around my mug and look out onto the street, I realise that it’s a similar action to what I’ve been doing all day, but this version is somehow more accepted. The window has never seemed more relevant to the action of people watching until today. It’s both a bridge and a barrier into the lives of others. As the glue starts to dry, it’s almost too cheesy how romantic it makes everything.

16 the windows of Galleri Bokboden in Bergen, Norway.
appear. This blur allows me to be a bit oblivious to details, and instead focus on the general shapes and colours of the other side, as well as the mere action of looking. I fall intensely for the edges of the windows, where the material subtly reveals itself. It’s nice how the action of concealing allows for new characteristics to emerge.

There is glue everywhere. I’m so messy. I’ve always been curious about how some artists seem to never get messy while I’m constantly covered in my materials. For once I’m not covered in sawdust even though this is when I could use it most\textsuperscript{17}. Realising this as I was installing made me think about the necessity of relying on others.

\textsuperscript{17} When there is excess glue on your hands in the woodshop, the easiest way to remove it is to cover your hands in sawdust and rub them together.
The shape of the space between us is also:
- meditative
- creating a clear division through its distortion
- a way to better understand this space
- time consuming
- composed of repetitive gestures
- a safe(r) space to make eye contact with strangers
- made by someone who is left-handed
- physically demanding
- messy

A name or a title, a title or a poem.
(Remember that) a poem is a fragile thing. 18

Then one day, you wake up and realise that you’re no longer putting on a brave face but rather that you have grown into the strength you’ve been needing to have.

18 A title of one of Vanessa Baird’s pieces from her solo exhibition, You are something else at Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo, on view between November 2017 - January 2018.
how to be alone (structure)
The action of building or construction is a center-point in my work, but it’s imperative that I clarify that my interests lie in structures, objects and structure-like objects that are both found and fabricated. This also falls into relation on a more formal standpoint in consideration to the materials, forms and methods that I work with and within. What I’ve been honing in on are structures in relation to parts or elements of something more complex: the space holds the structure, and the structure often offers support to something else, which makes me ask: what (or who) supports the space?

At what point is it okay to stop seeking support? (When is it okay to stop caring?)
7 July, 2017: The smell of the Cedar Room\textsuperscript{19} is intoxicating. If I close my eyes and dream really hard, it’s there. This is how spaces can stay with you (they never leave you). This room is filled with unconditional, timeless love. It’s humble in size but extravagant in the way that it holds all that is contained within it. At the end of the room is a chest that, to this day, houses Elizabeth Allen Fraser’s finest clothes. It’s built out of eucalyptus wood to preserve all her garments and to keep moths away. It’s a time capsule, preserving both her clothing and their love. The chest was built after her death\textsuperscript{20} by her husband Patrick Allan Fraser. It stands as a marker of how powerful their love was: to love someone enough to create a home for holding garments that will never be worn again. No one loves me enough to build a home for my clothes. (Maybe my clothes aren’t good enough to keep. Or) maybe I’m not good enough to love.

\textsuperscript{19} The Cedar Room in Hospitalfield
Do we always have to feel such intense love first hand to know that love still exists?
Do we always have to feel such intense pain first hand to know that pain still exists?
31 May 2017: If I see it in the eyes of our friends that she’s gone, do I still have to see it for myself?
As I sit under an old tree that’s tucked into the walled gardens of Hospitalfield, my eyes naturally look up. I seem to have found the perfect tree to support my weight at rest. It offers me shade, a place to sit, and a nice view to rest my eyes on. As the wind blows softly through their leaves, I hear them and I close my eyes. (They’re speaking). They’re teaching me lessons without saying a word, making me figure it out on my own (eventually). I like to think that as the wind brushes past my cheek, that the trees were imparting onto me the wisdom of all those that have been sheltered there before. (I kept my eyes closed, and took in every second of it).

And the trees, they said:
Here I am. Alone, but not by choice. (And not entirely). We’re standing free and strong together, demonstrating how to be tall and wise.

If I close my eyes and think back to this day under the trees, I can still feel that same wind. I understand Spencer Finch’s intentions in 2 Hours, 2 Minutes, 2 Seconds (Wind At Walden Pond, March 12)²¹ at a whole other level now. It wasn’t so much about replication, but rather, recollection. I think he was trying to recall a feeling that stretches far beyond wind, through wind. The sculptural properties of this work fall secondary in comparison to the feeling it evokes: the wind is the vessel. I have yet to experience this work first hand, but I trust in its power. In some cases, having the knowledge of the potential is enough.

In one of my earliest BA sculpture classes, we were taught about respecting our materials. The first assignment was to make a sculpture using only a 2 x 10” plank of pine – no more, and no less. My

²¹ This piece re-creates the changing breeze experienced on Walden Pond's shore with 44 electric fans that created a wall of wind. The duration of the wind cycle is a reference to Thoreau’s stay at the pond, which lasted two years, two months, and two days. ‘Spencer Finch’, accessed 4 November 2017, http://www.spencerfinch.com/view/mixed-media/75.
professors, the Fastwürms\textsuperscript{22} introduced this project by arranging all the planks of wood around the room and asked us to go towards the plank that we felt was calling us most. They read to us about Wabi-Sabi\textsuperscript{23} from Wikipedia, and asked us to take the time to get to know and experience our chosen piece of wood. This was the day that I fell in love with this material. I chose my plank with a mix of impulse and instinct; it felt right, and it was. Anne Truitt speaks of this sensation in the most honest and unequivocal way within the pages of \textit{Daybook} when she compares using steel instead of wood to a marriage proposal from a perfectly eligible man who just isn’t lovable; that it is wood that she loves.\textsuperscript{24} Wood is selfless and solid. Dependable. This immense attraction is potentially unexplainable, but the feeling is undeniably strong that I remain fixated years later. I’ve often struggled with finding the right words to explain how I feel about my connection with wood. It’s a give and take, and the shift in my relationship with the trees and that of the lumber in the woodshop is curious. I never thought of it much until I sat under the trees that day and suddenly realised that I was simultaneously seeking and finding refuge in my material, and that realisation was revelatory. I love wood for its qualities that belong so intrinsically to wood itself, and I will only employ another material when it can offer me something that wood can’t. Raw pine dents (bruises), it splinters, and is flawed in the most beautiful way. It warps because of all of its knots (birthmarks). I see a lot of humanity and humility in this material. Perhaps that’s my main attraction to it.

We tend to compromise a lot in the woodshop, with me forcing the wood to rest straight and to stop bowing, and it making its limitations of scale clear. Pine pushes me beyond my limits; I need to work for its respect. It’s not realistic for my structures to stand as tall and straight as they do. Fragile pieces of soft and knotted pine that are connected with minimal amounts of glue should not stand that tall independently, but with time and patience, they eventually do. It leaves me curious how people could ever take straight lines for granted. Maybe we never see them unless we make them ourselves.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} The Fastwürms are Kim Kozzi and Dai Skuze, a wiccan artist duo based in Creemore, ON that are associate professors at the School of Fine Arts and Music (SoFAM) at the University of Guelph, Canada, where I completed my BA in Studio Arts.


\textsuperscript{25} This excerpt was derived from Anne Truitt explaining the importance of straight lines in relation to Orion’s Belt: “Orion strides the southern sky once more in his autumn place. I go out into the early morning to see him, rising to his boldness. It is curious to me that people could ever take straight lines for granted. We never see them unless we make them ourselves; even the apparently straight horizon of the ocean against the sky curves if we see it from the air. Orion’s “belt” is three stars. The line of the gravity holding us to the earth, plumb from the sky to the globe under our feet, is the given element from which we abstract the concept of straightness in our own personal experience.” Truitt, 78.
[figure 3] *can you stay just a little bit longer?*, Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018

[figure 4] *Documentation of work (study)*, Kubburinn (Listaháskóli Íslands), Reykjavík, Iceland. Personal photograph by author. 13 December 2017
The smell of sawdust often takes me back to when I was 15 years old, standing in my high school’s woodshop, completely intimidated by my surroundings. This was before I knew how much I could learn from this material; how much it had to offer. Pine has a pulse that I am so in tune with – a heartbeat that I sometimes like to think that only I can hear. It’s subtly stubborn, just like me and it makes me feel like I’ve finally met my match. Wood is strong yet empathic; when you dent a corner (mistake), a drop of water (life) can sometimes make it spring back out. This teaches me the importance of forgiveness. I notice myself moving around my structures in a systematically fluid way. Rhythmic, but certainly not choreographed. Anything to get the piece just right. You can only gain a full understanding of wood’s properties by working with it and experiencing the way it behaves.  

Each piece has its own personality which requires time for its many characteristics to unravel. Wood holds an immense amount of what Jane Bennett refers to as Thing-Power, that reveals itself over time, and she states that there is a real power to harness from slowness. As I push against the pale pine with a block of sandpaper, I know that I have to distribute my strength evenly and remain firm yet tender in each movement. Sanding ingrains in me patience, and this smell of sawdust continues to occupy my thoughts intensely. Their beauty is both visible and invisible.

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27 Bennett defines Thing-Power as “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.” Jane Bennett, Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.
29 I have long been following Michael Dumontier’s practice as well as his collaborative work with Neil Farber. I think their balance between poetics, humour, sensitivity and melancholy is something that I’ve found so much inspiration in. This line is paraphrased from one of the cards in their Personal Messages edition which reads: “Your beauty is both visible and invisible”. Dumontier & Farber, ‘Personal Message’, accessed 13 December 2017, http://personalmessageblog.blogspot.is/.
1 June 2017: Yes.
(There are too many questions we want answered that we’re too afraid to ask).

I have known of Robert Therrien’s work for a while, but I encountered it in person for the first time recently at The Broad in Los Angeles. *Under the Table* makes me feel so youthful in a completely refreshing way, and my scale has never been more clear. Familiarity became fanciful as I stood under this giant sculpture of a dining room table. I felt like I was playing hide and seek (though no one seemed to be seeking), or like I just stepped into a whimsical fairytale. As I stood beneath this mass of enamel-covered wood, I got to thinking if altering the elements that allow something to exist with its intended purpose would still permit it to exist with intention. *Is this a table or a sculpture?* If one makes room to reconsider what once seemed as constant, it gives way for a shift in perspective.

It’s like slow motion speed dating:

- *I’m alone, but I’m with you. And I don’t know who needs the other more.*

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31 A dialogue that I imagine the sponge and the wooden structure to have with each other.
[figure 5] *can you stay just a little bit longer? (detail)*, Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018

[figure 6] *Documentation of work (study)*, Kubburinn (Listaháskóli Íslands), Reykjavík, Iceland. Personal photograph by author. 28 September 2017
The structures that I build propose a (re)consideration of space. Influenced by the walls that they’re placed within, these structures act as extensions of domestic architecture; they are both the space and the object. Built from common construction materials like pine, MDF and glue; they employ and reference the space itself (it holds them). Aesthetically minimal much like IKEA furniture, they work in systems and series together. They match. They perhaps even lack this appearance of uniqueness since they follow a self-generated system or logic, but they’re vaguely suggestive in nature to what our minds will allow them to become. This modular aesthetic is something that I’ve been negotiating with in my constructions for some time. They have this presence of instantaneousness, as if they have purpose or function. Each structure lacks the responsibility that household furniture has while still holding or being held in its own way.

When I left you and you were fine, I knew that I had done something right. (You exist like the furniture, though clearly not.)

Balance (or, the appearance of it) is one of the most critical elements of my practice. I work with the material until it’s resting, as I try have them exist in a state of dwelling. When I lack balance, I feel as though I lack structure. When I am without structure, I often feel helpless, useless and without purpose. I sometimes think that I could benefit from a grid of sorts to plot myself into. When I’m disoriented, I look onto various structures for guidance.

32 Here, the term “dwelling” is derived from Martin Heidegger’s essay Building, Dwelling, Thinking. He states that not all buildings are intended for dwelling, as he questions the notion of if building in itself allows for dwelling, since dwelling itself entails much more than just being. “the basic character of dwelling is to spare and preserve… dwelling itself is always a staying with things” Martin Heidegger, Building, Dwelling, Thinking, in Poetry, Language, Thought, 20. print (New York: Perennical Classics, 2009), 148.
Object and human
Together, in unison
Just as it should be

Sometimes, I write haikus for fun and clarity, and because the 5-7-5 syllable structure allows me to relax a bit and focus on the topic or issue at hand; they’re short poems for long stories.

If I were a piece of furniture, I’d probably be a beanbag chair.
how to be closer (intimacy)
Anyone that knows me would not be surprised that I’m going to take a moment to talk about food and my relationship with it. I credit my connection to food to being born into a large Filipino family. The kitchen is the heart of every Filipino home, and food is definitely the strongest love language\(^{33}\) of my family. My relationship with food is deep and complex, just like my mother, who I undoubtedly learned this expression of love from.

Kamayan is one of my favourite Filipino food traditions. A straight translation of the word would be “with hands” and it is a direct reference to the action of eating by hand without utensils. A long table is covered with banana leaves. White rice is piled high in the center, creating a bed for all the ulam\(^{34}\) to rest on. (The rice is the furniture).

Everyone is welcome at the table, and you must arrive hungry. The conversations to be had and lessons learned during kamayan are as endless as the food laid out, and you leave with your heart, mind and stomach overflowing. Kamayan feeds me in such an honest way as it continues to teach me more about the importance of generosity, of community, and of nourishing ourselves from the inside out. The experience of rolling the rice between my fingers is organic and natural. I shape the mound to fit into the curves of my hand, creating a space for the ulam to rest on, then I guide it all into my mouth with the assistance of my thumb.

Bring close to you what nourishes you; what sustains you and gives you life.
(Left hand, scoop. Right hand, feed)
(reach) (repeat like a chorus)
To get closer, remove all obstacles.
To get closer, occupy the space between yourselves.
To get closer, lean in.

Our hands are the most primitive tools that we have at our disposals, and kamayan was my first lesson in all of the wisdom to be gained through simplicity. The hand that forms my rock climbing hold sculptures is the same one that forms each ball of rice that I feed myself with when I come to the table for kamayan. In both cases, my hands hold so much strength. They form and feed, and carry significant weight. I find comfort in the rocks like I find comfort in sharing food.

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\(^{33}\) The term “Love Languages” is in reference to anthropologist Dr. Gary Chapman’s renowned 5 Love Languages assessment which outlines the 5 ways that he believes that we express and experience love. These ways are Acts of Service, Quality Time, Giving/Receiving Gifts, Words of Affirmation and Physical Touch. I strongly believe that food should be the token 6th love language. ‘Discover Your Love Language’, The 5 Love Languages®, accessed 4 October 2017, [http://www.5lovelanguages.com/](http://www.5lovelanguages.com/).

\(^{34}\) the main dish(es) in a Filipino meal, eaten with white rice.
[figure 7] Studio table, studio (Listaháskóli Íslands), Reykjavík, Iceland. Photograph by Andreas Brunner. 16 March 2018

[figure 8] can you stay just a little bit longer? (detail), Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018
[figures 9 and 10] *can you stay just a little bit longer? (detail)*, Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018
The holes in the rocks look a bit like our navels. They’re the tunnels (spaces) towards the strength (support). Central and grounding, they’re simultaneously necessary and mundane. These are life-giving passages. And our fingers can fit in our navels much like they grasp onto these rocks.

How many functions are there for the hand? Is the hand simply a generic tool that we are gifted as humans, or is it more? As it’s made of flesh and bone, it must be more. The hand is often the one that facilitates function, and hands also act as tools in conversation. So much emotion is conveyed through them. Emotions have the capability to stretch across our entire bodies, extending all the way to our fingertips – like when you squeeze the hand of your partner in a crowd to say things that words can’t always describe, or when my palms sweat profusely when I get nervous. Our hands tell stories. They pass down traditions. They help us to understand and navigate the world around us.

*And the hand allows for the bracelet on my wrist to stay in place.*

When scattered across the walls, I see these rocks to be a suggestion of choreography, a dance in vertical. The rocks offer themselves to our imagination. It starts in our minds and with our eyes, as they scan their surroundings, looking for what step could be taken next in order to advance. These moves progress to our personal tools, our hands, as they offer the implication of purpose. Some holds are easy, while some make you work a bit more to advance. Each rock seeks to be held (just right). Subtly, urgently. These rocks offer the implication of movement both through their forms and their placement. They’re quite similar to a young child that is hesitant to ask their first crush for dance at a party. It’s awkward, but it’s inevitable.

Clung sheepishly to the wall, they propose puzzles for our minds to decipher.

When rock climbing, the climber must use themselves as a tool for measure. The distance from their hand to their opposite shoulder gives the right amount of rope to tie a single figure 8 knot, and a fist away from the harness is where the knot is secured.
[figure 11] *can you stay just a little bit longer? (detail)*, Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018
Continuous steps go into walking. It’s choreography that’s ingrained in us: the most basic two-step, repeated. I often walk and trace the land with my body to familiarize myself with my surroundings when I feel helpless or anxious. Walking grounds me. Things are more known by taking steps; you know someone better after you share in a journey. Walking is an act of immense intimacy: it’s choreography that teaches us trust.

On my final day at Hospitalfield, Lucy, Laura and Isaac took me on one final walk along the Arbroath beach and offered me some of the most honest and sensitive advice for moving forward. They knew I didn’t want to leave. As we continued walking, I began to weep out of both fear and sadness and hoped that they didn’t notice. I looked out and watched the tide come in to try and stop the tears. *If the water can calm itself, so can you*, I thought. Then I thought back to the walks I went on with Alex along the beach the month before. This was where I knew for certain that we were no longer strangers for the first time. I thought back to walking with Jo along the cliffs and feeling safe in each other’s company. I looked out and tried to memorize the view so that I could close my eyes and return to this feeling whenever I needed it (it’s so much harder to forget a feeling). On the drive to the train station I saw a rainbow, and I felt like it was a sign telling me that I’d be okay, and that I was a different person than the one that arrived three months earlier.

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37 This phrase is in reference to Martin Heidegger’s essay titled *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*.
38 From a Facebook Messenger conversation with Danica Evering regarding homesickness, 11 July, 2017
39 Lucy Byatt, Director of Hospitalfield, Laura Simpson, Programme Manager of Hospitalfield, and Isaac, Lucy’s whippet
40 Alexander Storey Gordon, former Hospitalfield artist-in-residence
41 Joanna Helfer, Dundee-based artist
20 October, 2017: I’m on my way to see my family in California for a wedding. I am on my way to being with those who know me entirely. I will exhale completely for the first time in almost a year. I’m waiting for the plane to take off and I currently have the entire row to myself. Hopefully no one else boards the plane so I can stretch out. I’m not really in the mood to share space today. Airplane etiquette is like long term elevator etiquette, and I don’t know if I have it in me to be polite for 9 hours straight. Is how we navigate through our relationships with people similar to how we navigate around furniture and through spaces? Could I compare my relationship with my mother to the feeling of relaxing in the most comfortable seat that I have ever sat on? Is how I’m careful to only occupy my own space on this budget airline seat similar to how we may act around an acquaintance? As I inch closer to arriving in Los Angeles, I’m beginning to realise how much I depend on my own personal support structures, and how everything has shifted since being physically separated from them. The sound of the plane moving through the sky is so soothing, it puts me in a trance. I’m taking in my last moments of quiet (even
though it’s not really quiet). I’ve always thought of flights to be so precious. For these 9 hours, I don’t belong to a time-zone yet I will hover over multiple ones. I’ll fly over the place that I once fought so hard to never have to call home. If only the plane would make a pit stop there on the way.

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42 “Home” is referring to Toronto, Canada.
The belayer controls the safety rope for a climber, securing their well-being while they climb through and repel from the course. Essentially, they support the climber. Before the climber proceeds, a safety check is conducted to ensure that both the climber and belayer are safely secured. As the climber begins their course, the belayer must pull out the slack to keep the rope taut. If the action of caring is to take on a weight or burden for an other, then they need to trust that that weight will be held for them safely. There is a comfort that can only come with time (maybe you’re holding on for a while). That said, you need to be open to receiving care in order to be able to fall into trust.

Faller: "I am ready to fall. Are you ready to catch me?"
Catcher: "I am ready to catch you. Fall away."
Faller: "Falling."
Catcher: "OK"

I know that I need to trust my work. I need to trust that it will stand, find balance, and that they will support one another. I need to trust in their inherent strength entirely. Trusting is more of an action than we often give it credit for. When art gives us the space to fill in the gaps by pulling from what we have within ourselves, these are the moments when I bask in the true power of it. I think of when Mark and I navigated through *Call to Action*. We removed our shoes, unfolded the band of beige canvas, and stepped into it together. He sensed my fear, and he made me feel safe. The action of leaning back and supporting each other while maintaining eye contact is likely why Walther’s work continues to resonate deeply within me. Walther trusts that we will activate his work appropriately, similarly to how we ourselves need to trust those who step into it with us.

My investment in intimacy unfolds in various facets of my work. It exists literally, with my affection for the materials and objects that I grow to know like extensions of my core. I fall for the qualities and traits in each one which, to me, gives space for seemingly modular things to be unique. I find myself becoming emotionally invested the more that these objects begin to unravel and let me in. Intimacy also exists in my headspace, as I merge material and meaning, as concerns of trust, empathy, love and closeness are recurring. All those things exist conceptually, and much like the studs that are evenly spaced along a wall frame, they exist formally as well.

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43 Treeincement, Rock Climbing for Beginners- Video 4- Setting Up As The Belayer, accessed 25 November 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-FbtppVC7w
44 I am particularly drawn to the dialogue that goes into the trust fall exercise as it demonstrates on such a basic level what actions are involved in trusting, and how important it is to put them into practice. ‘Trust Lean: Description of a Trust-Building Activity’, accessed 14 December 2017, http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/TrustLean.html.
how to keep you here with me (object)
16 December 2017: The duration of this flight is about the same as the time difference from Reykjavík to Toronto. As I’m flying across the Atlantic Ocean, I notice that we are flying parallel with the sun. Today I get to experience two sunsets, and they couldn’t come at a more urgent time. 5 hours later and 5 hours behind the time I’ve reluctantly grown to know, I arrive in Toronto. I have not been home in a year and I’ve put this off for long enough. It’s time to face coming back to something that used to be comfortable. I’m terrified. (I hate that I’m terrified). I arrive to my parent’s home after 10 hours of travel and immediately collapse onto the couch. I let a tear fall down my cheek, knowing that I’m in a place where I know I’m safe and I can rest. I used to think that this couch was hideous, but today, I need its support so desperately. This couch knows me so well (it holds me well). The cushion that I’m lying on with all my baggage is the same one I stained with hot pink nail polish when I was 14. I flipped it over so no one would know, trusting that it was a secret that only we shared. The couch kept my secret and absorbed my tears.
Graham Harman\textsuperscript{46} unpacks what defines an object with justifications which he lays out in trifold. He firstly states that an object is a single unit (one thing). Harman then explains that an object must also be independent of its qualities, which means that it is able to change over time. Finally, he argues that an object must be independent to its relations. This means that an object is capable of having various and shifting relations with different objects simultaneously while remaining the original object.\textsuperscript{47} While there have been opposing theories in the realm of object-oriented thinking, I resonate most deeply with Harman’s notions.

I often get to thinking about my responsibility as both an object-maker and object-user. Why do my objects deserve to exist? What can they offer to the world that is not yet being addressed? Who cares about these propositions that I am offering? Who are they made for? The answers lie within the lives and loves of these objects.

My sculptures are more than mere objects to me. I develop a relationship with them in their entirety, falling deeply for their forms, materials and colours; all of their intrinsic features that to me, make them undoubtedly personified. As much as they’re inanimate, they’re not, and I truly feel as though this exploration exists as much on my part as that of the sculpture’s. It’s a give and take between us. Truitt’s description of falling in love with an object is extremely poignant in this case – especially when she compares completing a sculpture to seeing her child for the first time: this idea of knowing them before they were born, but that their lives are their own.\textsuperscript{48}

I sometimes get to thinking: I have you, but do I really?

\textsuperscript{46} Graham Harman is an contemporary American philosopher who is most known for his developments in Object Oriented Philosophy and Speculative Realism.

\textsuperscript{47} From Harman’s 2007 lecture at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, UK. Graham Harman - Objects, A Brief Description - YouTube, accessed 24 November 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oOqGo3_YHA.

\textsuperscript{48} “This mutual exchange is one of exploration on my part, and, it seems to me, on the sculpture’s also. Its life is its own. I receive it. And after the sculpture stands free, finished, I have the feeling of “oh, is was you,” akin to the feeling with which I always recognized my babies when I first saw them, having made their acquaintance before their birth. This feeling of recognition lasts only a second or two, but is my ample reward.” Truitt, 78-79.
can you stay just a little bit longer? (detail), Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Photograph by Claudia Hausfeld. 2 May 2018
27 May, 2017: I wish I felt like the version of me that you seem to always see. You have this way of speaking to me in a way that teaches me how to love myself more. It gives me this sense of worth that I know puts me in an extremely vulnerable position, but I feel entirely safe when I’m with you. How is it that you are able to hold me so close with just your words? How is it that silence and distance are both the best and worst things to happen to us? It’s the tension in the simple things.
When work evokes laughter, I believe it often taps into something that we can relate to ourselves. It’s important to be able to laugh at ourselves, and since (wo)man is always the first unit of measure, we will often project ourselves and our experiences onto what surrounds us. Erwin Wurm’s work continues resonate so deeply within me for this reason. He questions these common objects and calls to action the viewer to employ them according to his suggestive drawings. These instructional drawings are equivalent to blueprints for a house that is yet to be built. Wurm’s way of approaching these objects offers a light touch on potentially heavy subjects. They hold a sense of whimsy that suggests that the implication that knowing (and often smirking) is enough.

Wurm tackles space in a subtly bold manner, by asking the public to deal with occupying it in unconventional ways. He hovers between public and private, as he challenges viewers to (re)consider domestic objects and spaces in a gallery setting, allowing for the mind to expand on the potential of these commonplace things. His works that employ architecture and furniture are what I most relate to. In *Untitled (Stairs)*, he asks for someone to “be stairs for someone else” and while the visual of seeing someone follow the instructional drawing which asks them to balance three planks of wood on their hands, knees and feet⁴⁹ evokes the cheekiest grin on my face, it also leads me to think of what it really means to support.

Who will take on this task?
*I’m not suitable for this.*

Who is strong enough to carry this weight?
*I’m not responsible enough to hold someone up.*

Who allowed this to happen?
*I’d probably fall before they do.*

When one is confronted with a new way of interacting with something you thought you understood in its entirety, there’s a definite shift in power and perspective. Maybe it’s similar to suddenly realising that you have a crush on an old friend. Perhaps this comes from an urgency for excitement and stimulation and in wanting a change from the everyday. Jérôme Sans offers a clever collection of questions in response to Wurm’s 2002 catalogue for his exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki. He asks if it is possible to transfer a sense of loss into a sculpture,⁵⁰ and the only way I can think of answering that is that it can likely be transferred only if the art-maker feels a sense of loss themselves. I begin to consider how far back onto support we are willing to go.

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I’m fond of how Wurm speaks of the Mid-Century design of the furniture he uses being no longer a nod to a specific taste, but rather a common one.\textsuperscript{51} Essentially, each new “thing” is derived from a former “thing” – (a thing) once removed. This leads me to think of how far back we can or should go before the original is no longer relevant. Wurm’s work leads me to consider the difference between depending on others versus being dependant on others.

I used to believe so strongly in Heidegger’s notion that it is language that tells us the nature of a thing, provided that we understand language’s own nature.\textsuperscript{52} I tried to make this notion weave its way into my practice seamlessly, deciding that if this was a fact, it could act as my guide to justifying the work that I make and why I make it. (\textit{Can a structure feel the same anxiety that I do?}) I think that it’s important to acknowledge when we feel a particular connection with someone or something, but it’s equally as important to acknowledge that this relationship is often personal and may not be understood by others entirely. I think that we often pull from common or similar memory and experience banks, but each relationship is personal and unique. Perhaps things have various meanings or symbolisms pertaining to each individual relationship rather than an unequivocal call or message. There is a true beauty in subjectivity. My work is the result of my personal dialogue and connection with these objects, giving a space for them to exist entirely regardless of if anyone else can understand our shared language. It is when I find myself immersed in these experiences when my connection to the theories and philosophies of Bennett and Harman are vindicated. Then a song by The Smiths came on and I got confused all over again.\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{52} Heidegger, 144.

\textsuperscript{53} Here, I am referring to the line in \textit{Ask} that goes ‘\textit{Nature is a language - can’t you read?’}. The Smiths, \textit{“Ask”}, 1986
10 June, 2017: So here is this space within a space within a space. A private space within a public space: the Drawing Room. There are carvings on the ceiling, 197, according to Alasdair. I have yet to count them for myself because he seems smart and trustworthy. I’m still in awe of how the sunlight covers each carving. I could watch that dance for hours. There are tapestries on the walls that both blend in and stand out. I admire how they have the ability to do that. This room is fancy. So here I am, on a cobalt blue chaise lounge, and I’m barefoot. It seems so wrong in an absolutely wonderful way. (I like it). This isn’t the most comfortable seat in the house, but this room hugs me in such a special way, so I decide to stay anyway. I can hear the silence of this space so clearly. The only way that’s comfortable to sit here is the responsible way: legs crossed, shoulders back and sitting up straight. (Maybe I should put my shoes back on.) I’m learning to find comfort in new ways here. It’s interesting when a space brings you to tears. Then I begin to think: is it the room or the thoughts it provokes?

54 The Drawing Room in Hospitalfield
55 One of Hospitalfield’s knowledgeable volunteer tour guides, who facilitated my first full tour of the house
how to be still (nonsense)
15 August, 2017: The Picture Gallery doesn’t make me cry though. I think I’m too curious to cry in here. I feel like I’m finally in a space that’s big enough to contain (and maybe even silence) my emotions. There’s enough intricacies built into the walls and all that is housed within them to overpower all my thoughts, for once. This space allows for the freedom to just exist in it. In the Picture Gallery is a seat. It holds four people all facing away from each other. This is the most antisocial piece of furniture, yet it’s so decadent that I remain fixated on it. I can only imagine how functions functioned here. How bodies moved around these objects – carefully – while remaining socially aware and engaged (as you would in a room of this nature). It leads me to contemplate about the purpose of it. Maybe each guest gets their own antisocial space to retreat to while still staying close. In a crowded party, I often find refuge in a seat. It’s then when I realise how furniture can support us on more than a literal level.

It’s also nice how the windows in this room close – to be secured with so much detail and care. To be held onto tightly, knowing that

56 The Picture Gallery in Hospitalfield
this is where you're meant to stay.

To fit perfectly, since you were

built with intention.
I think a lot about purpose when I make work. Particularly perception versus purpose. Nothing is fixed, though we seem to have imposed various implications onto otherwise neutral things over time. My constructions hold a connotation to both furniture and architectural structures, yet they lack the function that is needed for them to exist with that purpose. Process is the determining factor that can shift their significance. It’s my process of building that I believe pulls my practice away from being too referential with those of macho minimalists from the past, as I believe that there exists a pulse in my work that calls for it to be read with less movement and more time. They’re living, and they rest firm in asking of you to see them with stillness.

I have been described as brave countless times in my life. I usually just smile awkwardly in lieu of a verbal acknowledgement since I don’t know how to respond. I never really thought of myself as brave since it’s not brave to do something that doesn’t scare you.57 I heard this a lot particularly when I began travelling - about how adventurous and brave it is to live out of a tiny backpack, navigating through various towns and cities, not knowing where I’d be sleeping most nights. To me this wasn’t bravery. I wanted to travel, so I did. The alternative scared me more than sleeping on a small luggage shelf on a rickety overnight train to Prague ever will. I am not the most decisive person, and I have always been apprehensive to make commitments. If I never made plans, I couldn’t experience disappointment. The pressure to keep a promise has often given me deep anxiety because I never want to let anyone down. Perhaps travelling was more about running away rather than running around. Maybe what was seen as brave to others was actually cowardly at its core. I have never quite had enough bravery to stay still.

I never associated myself with bravery until one day in the Philippines when, over breakfast, my cousin described both our coffee and myself as “matapang”, which translates to “brave” in Tagalog.58 I was telling him how I hung off of the back of the Jeepney59 the night before and how I was quickly scolded to sit inside. It seemed fun, and I didn’t know that women weren’t allowed to hang off the back. He just laughed, not surprised at all by my behaviour, took a sip of the coffee and said that it was “brave” as well, meaning that I’d made it a bit too strong. He poured milk into his, I did not.

(I thought I needed distance from familiarity in order to grow, but the farther I am from everything that I have learned to define as comfort, the more that I realise that maybe, what we all need more of, is closeness.

57 In a passage from this essay by Lena Dunham, she discusses her experience with and opinions regarding nudity and sex scenes as an actor, and I very much related to how bluntly she explained bravery in her terms. “Another frequently asked question is how I am “brave” enough to reveal my body on-screen… My answer is: It’s not brave to do something that doesn’t scare you. I’d be brave to skydive. To visit a leper colony. To argue a case in the United States Supreme Court or go to a CrossFit gym. Performing in sex scenes that I direct, exposing a flash of my weird puffy nipple, those things don’t fall into my zone of terror.” Lena Dunham, Sex Scenes, Nudes Scenes, and Publicly Sharing Your Body in Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She’s ‘Learned’, 2014, 105.
58 Tagalog is the primary dialect that is spoken in the Philippines.  
59 One of the primary modes of transportation in the Philippines, Jeepneys were originally made from American military jeeps that were left over from World War II. They’re crowded, kitschy, crazy and are iconic symbols in Filipino culture.
Closeness, that is, whether near or far.)
20 December, 2017: It’s my first proper day back in Toronto in a year. I can feel my heart beating faster as the streetcar inches closer and closer to Gladstone Avenue. I’ve forgotten how city traffic adds to my anxiety. Why am I so nervous? (Nothing bad will happen). I get off a stop early to calm down and get some fresh air.

I open the door, hear the alarm chirp at me, familiarly, and I step inside. Some things never change. I forgot how relaxing it is to know a place so well. The gallery walls are as white as the day I left, the basement is still unfinished, and Michael is still in the back office working tirelessly, and sitting amongst the most amazing collection of art. I have learned and unlearned so much within these walls, and it will forever occupy a massive place in my heart. I knew that in leaving, there would be some people, places and things that I would never see again, and over time that list keeps on growing. But that old mustard yellow leather chair in the seating area of Michael’s office is still there for me to plant myself into.

“The gallery” being MKG127 in Toronto, where I worked at from 2012 until the day before I moved to Iceland. MKG127 is directed by Michael Klein.
My work is braver than I am. It stands in for all the feelings, urges, thoughts and worries that I possess, yet they’re more poised and polished than I could ever be. Composed of real and raw materials, they reveal what I have yet to find the words or courage to vindicate. I am able to hide if I’m shy or anxious, while my work is often too large to even try to. In constructing each one until they are structurally sound, I continue to learn from them, and they remain standing stronger than I ever will. They embody many traits that I strive for. My work is braver than I could ever be, and that is exactly why I trust it entirely.

I get to thinking about the senselessness of this notion, and how subjective bravery is. My work is not constructed with the purpose of exuding bravery, but I find this characteristic to exist in my work in the most charmingly irrational way. There is nothing brave about a sponge resting on some sticks of pine, but I can’t help but be a bit envious of their confidence. It’s nice to not have to work so hard for someone to see the real you. It’s even nicer to encounter someone who is willing to push past the façade as they see the structure that lies within. It’s rare to find people who listen as well as they speak. Sometimes all we need is for someone to give us a chance.

Some of the most notable images in art history are still-life paintings. My early background in painting seems to resurface in my practice time and time again. I’m drawn to colour and colour theory, composition, foreground and background relationships - all these features that are often housed under the umbrella of painting come through in my work. Still-life painting is likely one of the most well-known genres within the medium, and its various iterations carry significant weight throughout art history. They act as a glimpse into what material possessions were most cherished or coveted at that time, and memento mori reminds us of our own mortality because they allow for the ephemeral to be made eternal. Through still-lifes, I’m reminded that stillness is more of a concept than a literal action.

You teach me things that I don’t always want to learn.
You learn to savour time the less you have it.

The infamous travel writer, Pico Iyer has an entire theory that oscillates around what he calls “the art of stillness”. For some time now, I have followed and admired his words for their honesty and poetic bluntness. He stresses that stillness is essential in order to appreciate movement as it offers a new perspective: nowhere (or nothing) is magical unless you can bring the right eyes to it. Perhaps Iyer’s meditation retreats in the temples of rural Japan are similar to when I sit on my studio floor for hours, surrounded by and staring at my collection of found objects and fabricated structures. It is in these moments where (no)thing transforms into something. Those moments where I contemplate over the subtle

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62 The Latin term “memento mori” directly translates into “you will have to die”. A memento mori painting will often include a skull, but clocks, fruits, flowers and other symbols that represent our personal time passing are also common.
yet complex nuances of these things are when they’re transformed; this alchemical process is my meditation. Though I prefer to consider them as anonymous rather than inanimate.
how to know when it’s done
5 February 2018: This pink light that covers Reykjavík at this time of year is one of the reasons why my time with this land is my most dysfunctional yet necessary relationship. I hate that I love it (and I hate that I admitted it). I’ve often felt as though I’m treating pleasure and pain the same here, and I’m still deciding if it’s a good thing or not.

Today, I tried to watch the sunset in a snowstorm. It’s dangerous when I’m as equally stubborn as I am hopeless. I could barely open my eyes to watch the turbulent waves crashing just meters from my feet. The wind kept my eyes closed most of the time. It kind of hurt but I pretended to be fine and enjoy it for a while. Exactly one year ago, I chose to stay when I should have left. Now I have to stay through the storm.

The wind blew stronger, like a constant slap in the face asking me to wake up and face reality. I knew that I should leave, but I stayed. I shut my eyes to not let any more tears freeze on my face. (I’m being tested again). I just needed to make sure that she knew I was sorry. (She knows). Throughout this last year, vulnerability has grown in the space that pride used to occupy. I sat on the cold wooden
bench until the wind stopped. I knew it was just for a moment. I still don’t know if this break in the wind was forgiveness, a desperate cry for me to let go, or simply happenstance, but I took it as a sign, got up and left. On this day last year, I got the most beautiful cotton candy coloured sunset to rest my heart in. Today I got a snow storm. If I’ve learned one thing from staying here, it’s how to listen to my surroundings. I think I’m being told that it’s time to move on. Maybe we’re never supposed to try and memorialize regret.

Ideally, I would have watched the sunset until I could watch the stars. But I’m learning that as hard as I try, I can’t force what is not meant to be. I promise to try and watch the sunset for you at least twice a year, every year.
What happens when you’ve exhausted all options yet none seem to be enough?

*You said before that maybe I was the problem. Maybe it’s just for a lack of perception.*

healing mechanisms > coping mechanisms

I like to wish at 12:34 rather than 11:11. The sequence of numbers is just as sensitive in my opinion, and there’s less people wishing at that time so it raises my odds.

*I’ll try again tomorrow.*

During his Emmy acceptance speech in 1997⁶⁴, Fred Rogers asked the audience to take 10 seconds of silence to think about the special ones who have loved us all into being. He offered to watch the time. I now ask you, the one who is holding this stack of words in your hands, to do the same. But I ask you to think of the walls that hold you, the structurally sound ground beneath your feet, and the ceiling that shows you how high to aspire to. I ask you to take a moment to notice the chair that lets your legs rest, the table where you gather for meals, and the shelves that hold the books that feed your brain. I ask you to take a moment to think of all the things, living and non-living, inanimate and anonymous, that offer their lives into loving us all into being.

I’ll watch the time.

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[figure 13] can you stay just a little bit longer? (condensed materials list), Gerðarsafn Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur, Iceland. Personal photograph by author. 8 May 2018
Epilogue: *notes on the work*
Notes on the work:

1. The edges of the playdoh dipped paper reveal themselves in a similar way to how the glue on the windows did at Galleri Bokboden (I didn’t end up using the paper).
2. Don’t hold yourself back
3. It’s not about you
4. The structures around us often teach us to put others before ourselves. In grammar, for example: you and I, not I and you.
5. You cannot live without a fire (so I’ve been told).
6. I think that I’m finished thinking that I am able to cry you back into being.
7. I find it curious how often I’ve been asked if I practice rock climbing and study furniture design. I consider this thought so flattening – if I got any closer to knowing them on a more technical or professional level, then I’d get bored, and there’s no fun in that. It’s like choosing to know someone’s CV before getting to know their heart. Why is art not considered as enough anymore? I think the people who’ve asked me this have missed the point entirely.
8. On bruises and birthmarks (on wood and on flesh): Some you are born with, some come and go, while others join later and choose to stay.
9. Are happy tears just our eyes salivating like our mouth does when we’re hungry and we smell something delicious?
10. Then what are sad tears comparable to?
11. I don’t know why I can’t help but remain so fixated on you.
12. I’ve lost interest in a person far faster than I’ve lost interest over an object.
13. Maybe this was a little too personal
14. I find it interesting the relationship of text with this work in a purely visual way. The rocks act like punctuation marks: some ask questions, some are definite, some are resting, and some want to be heard a little bit louder. The small wooden L-shaped structure and the long curved sliver that rests within its own custom-carved divot cradle the work awkwardly in their abstracted parenthesis-like embrace.
15. I want to disassociate from over-romanticizing the notion of care. It’s far too important for that. I think the action of caring is often lost to the romanticism of it.
16. Is it mere coincidence that the words care and carry are quite similar?
17. As the playdoh rocks dry, their materials (and in turn, their material properties) change as well.
18. In losing my most prized possession, I was reminded of the insignificance of material things.
19. materials: architecture, care, choreography (flour, salt, water), intimacy, modularity, nonsense, object, structure, support, trust, watercolour, wood (pine). I like that most people missed it (it’s for the ones that seek to know more).
20. The tulip that kisses my dew-filled window; it lets me know that I’ve done well.
bibliography


additional texts & sources


‘Canadian Art: Care and Wellness’, Winter 2018.


All illustrations were made by the author.