



The New Museum
of the Viking Age

Public Art /
Proposals

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The New Museum of the Viking Age Proposals for Public Art

Artists

Carola Grahn

Germain Ngoma

Jim Særnlom

Shubhangi Singh

Sigrid Espelien

Curated by

Drew Snyder

Mechu Rapela

Acknowledgement

The curators and artists acknowledge the Sami people as the traditional custodians of the land and as the First Nations of the Fennoscandian region. We acknowledge and support their claim to land, water and self-determination.

We would like to pay our respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging, and would like to offer our apologies for the continued negligence, violence and disrespect towards their rightful claims.

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Dear Reader,

In 2021, we began the task of curating the public art project for the coming Museum of the Viking Age. In the early days, we set out to listen to the people who had already been working on the new museum for quite some time: archaeologists and educators, architects and engineers. In these initial conversations, particularly with the archaeologists, we were drawn to how they described their field's approach to knowledge as tentative, unstable and in flux. This is because of the realities that accompany the study of such long-ago eras, where mysteries are stubborn, and the archaeological technologies used to understand distant histories are steadily advancing. These advances in themselves often call for dramatic revisions, sometimes from one year to another, of what we thought we knew about mediaeval and ancient times. An important task for the museum then, we learned, was to create a stable platform for knowledge in motion, a solid structure capable of receiving destabilising discoveries with open arms.

This inspired us to destabilise our own structures and processes as we set out to develop a plan for public art in the new museum. We began by writing a strategy document that laid the ground for inviting artists in at an earlier stage and on different terms than are usual, opening up the possibilities for them to co-define and develop the project and its premises. The document you are reading now is the first product of this process, in which the 'kunstplan' becomes an artistic output of its own, over and above being a straightforward planning document.

While the earlier strategy document invited artists to take the reins, it nevertheless proposed certain theoretical or conceptual starting points for the project. These had to do with considering the new Museum of the Viking Age via ideas of collectivity, historiography, nationalism and the sociopolitical imaginary of 'modern' Norway. We also hoped to encourage an engagement with Viking history on its own terms via artistic research and material processes. Moreover, we aimed to speculate over the contemporary or future status of the museum itself – as if to

ask what meanings we might discover through reflecting on the move from Vikingskipshuset (Viking Ship Museum) to Vikingtidsmuseet (Museum of the Viking Age), a nominal transition from the object-related to the temporal which is underwriting the current historic transformation of an institution tasked with mediating central elements of Norwegian and Nordic cultural history.

With these starting points in mind, it has been rewarding to see the artist proposals take shape. We believe the ideas and conversations that follow here bear witness to the artists' serious engagement with the starting points, while also showing how they brought welcome expansions, critiques, revisions and deviations from what we may have anticipated initially. The plans bring bold artistic energy into the museum's sphere, opening up the new Museum of the Viking Age to creative engagement and the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration across a range of fields, from geology and ecology, museology, conservation, material practices, and gender and Indigenous histories.

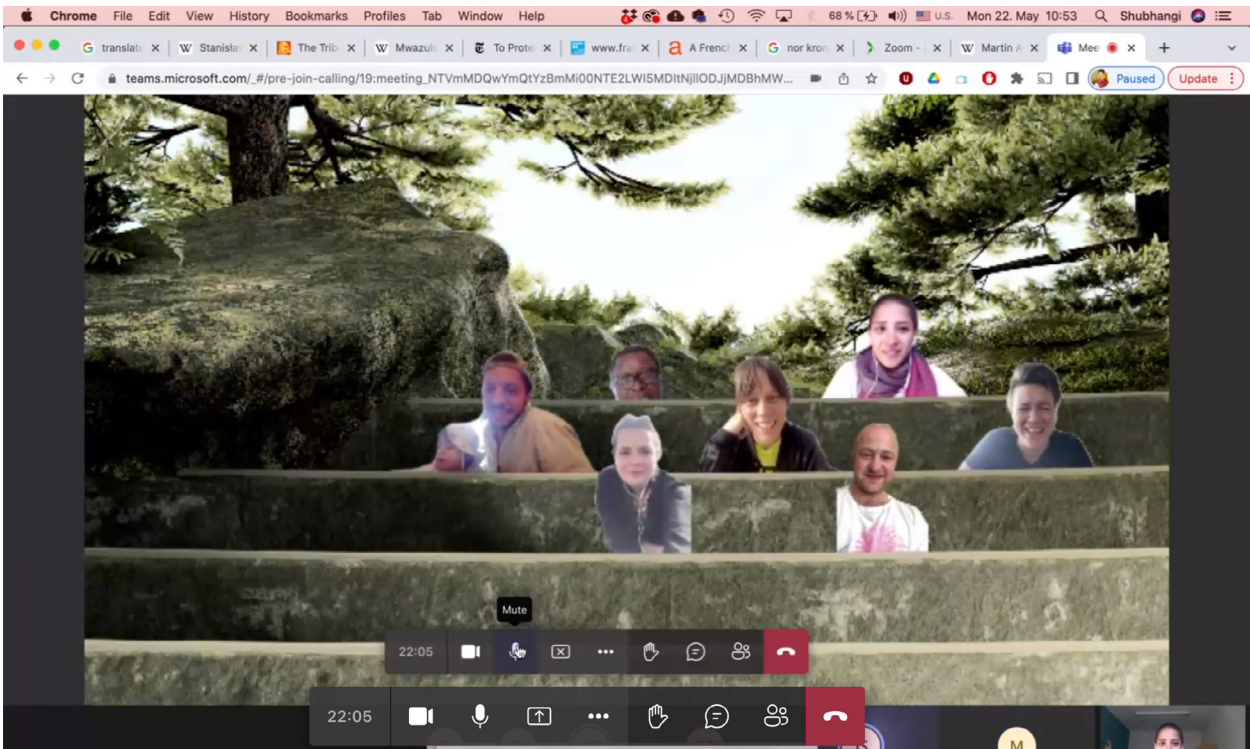
The artists have approached the brief of working in a group by proposing a constellation of individual projects which have each been subjected to a collective process, with an additional group project situated in the museum's cafe which, in their words, aims to 'carry the spillover' from their other projects into a more relational work. Together the artists have shared ideas through impressively rigorous and open conversations, a dialogue which has unfolded through internal meetings, presentations, brainstorming sessions and group critiques of their own proposals over the last year. We the curators note our admiration of the group's ability to mobilise an organisational structure that has kept the works' development on track, with each artist spontaneously taking on different roles that, as we see it, have propelled the project forward while keeping inspiration and creativity alive. We have played dialogical and structural roles in these processes, enjoying the indications and invitations we received along the way without always knowing the details of what exactly was going on in the group.

We believe that a strong collective structure was formed that has nevertheless allowed the artists to stay rooted in their own individual practices. Invitations to the artists were extended first and foremost on the basis of our understanding of their work and its connection to the topics sketched out in the strategy. We are happy to see the proposals engage with the particular contexts of the new museum while also clearly extending out from their own varied interests in research and experimentation. The art plan as artist-book approach is also a strategy the group has absorbed and adopted to weave individual practices into a collective structure. To us this is a solid prompt for deeper research into both critical methodologies for planning and producing public art projects (in the spirit of previous KORO initiatives in places such as Bergen and Agder, to name two) and how group work and individual practices can become entangled and coexist in fresh ways. We very much look forward to seeing how these dynamics unfold over the coming years of the project, ahead of the museum's opening later in the decade. The proposal to include an older work by the artist Elisabeth Haarr, described in more detail later in this document, also connects to ideas of collectivity and individuality via aspects of Norwegian material history and the history of public art in Norway in ways that help push the thematics of the project into new terrains.

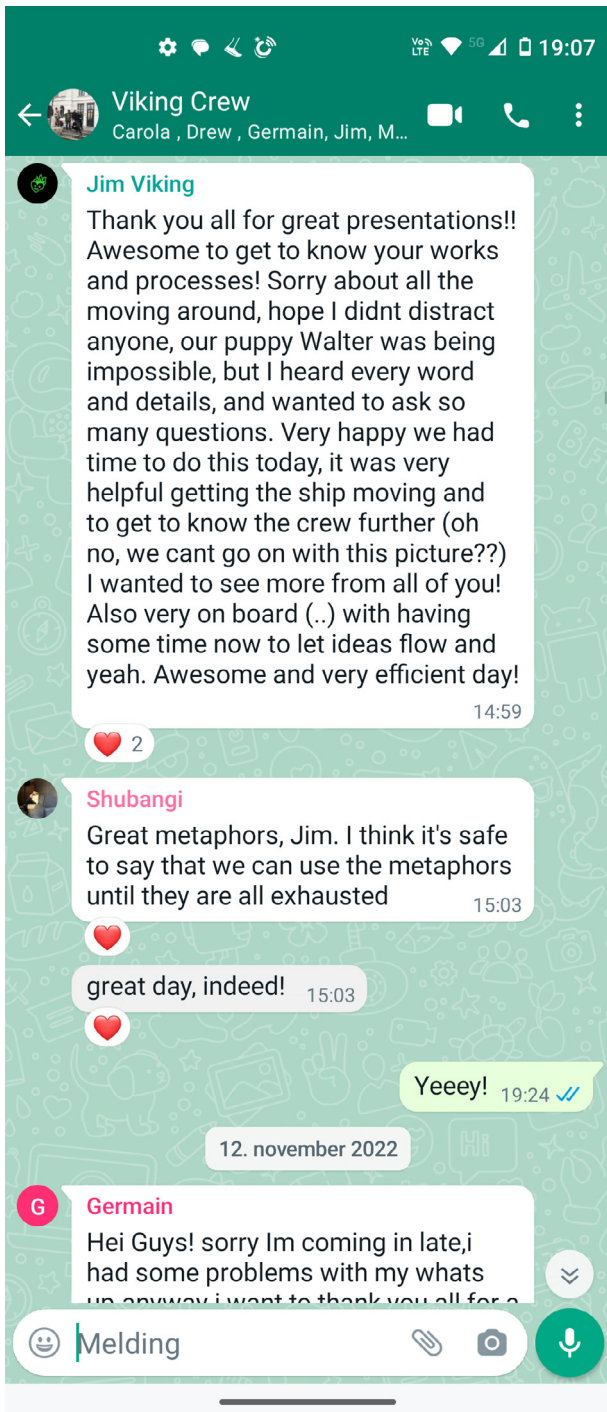
It has been inspiring to be around Carola, Germain, Jim, Shubhangi and Sigrid as they hash out the nature of our invitation and how they want to respond to it. We are grateful for their generosity and willingness to go into the project with not a small amount of conviction and creativity despite clear challenges that the context and process have provided. We welcome more talks and planning with and between these five artists and all the other stakeholders as the project moves towards realisation. We look forward to deepening the already fruitful collaborations with the constellation of experts and educators involved in crafting the new museum, from people at Kulturhistorisk museum and UiO to Statsbygg and the architecture teams at AART and SLA.

From a curatorial perspective, we see the project's organisational structure and its content as two sides of the same coin. We've always thought of a collective form as an exciting if not obvious way for us to engage with a history that itself has been fundamental to the construction of collective identity in Norway, such as Viking history has been. As the artists in this group continue diligently to develop the project, spending time understanding the scope of the invitation and working out their ideas, an independent proposition begins to take shape. Not fully visible to us or under anyone's control, it is a proposition in which the realities of these five artists and their practices, together with their collective involvement in this process, can set the stage for an intervention into the mythical contours which Viking history has helped draw around the sociopolitical imaginary of Norway today.

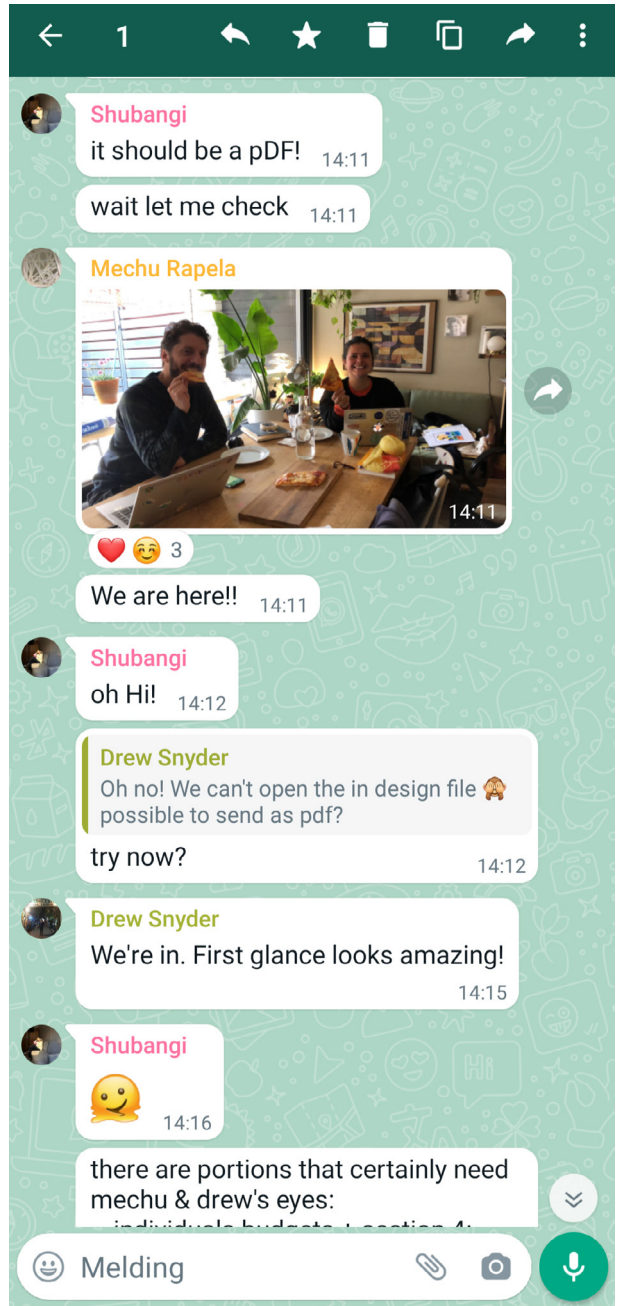
– *Drew & Mechu*

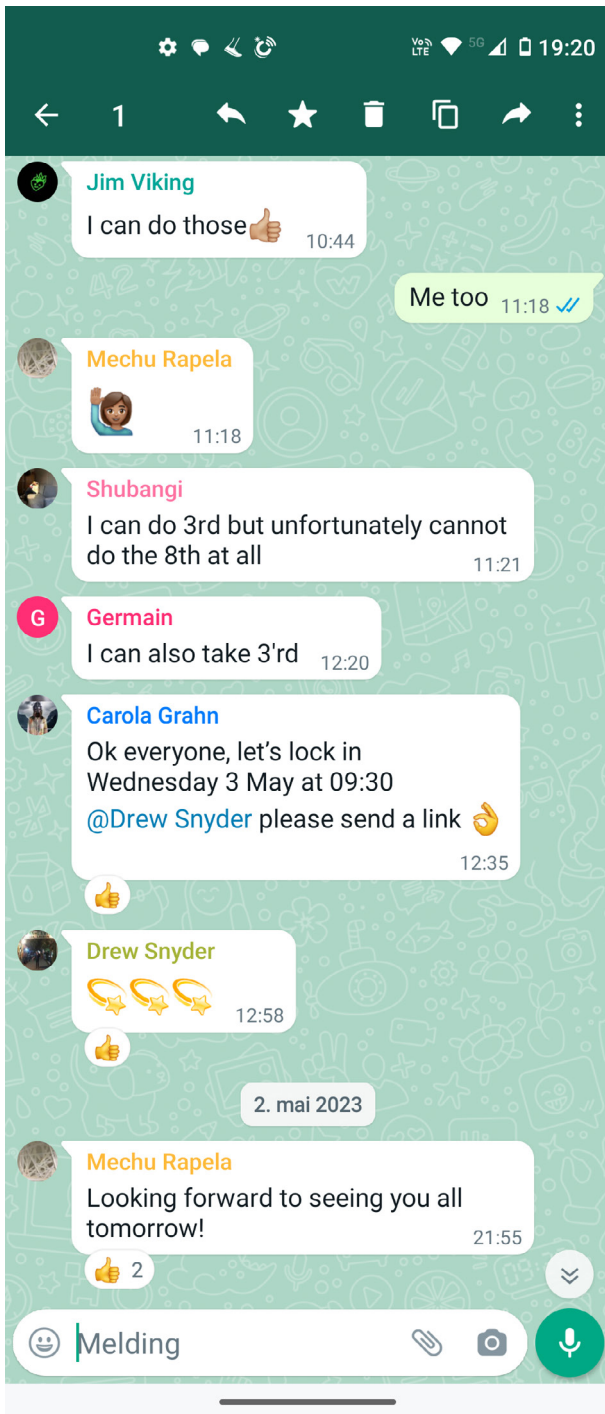


Teams meeting, 22 May 2023
Left to right: Drew, Mechu, Germain, Carola, Shubhangi, Jim, Sigrid

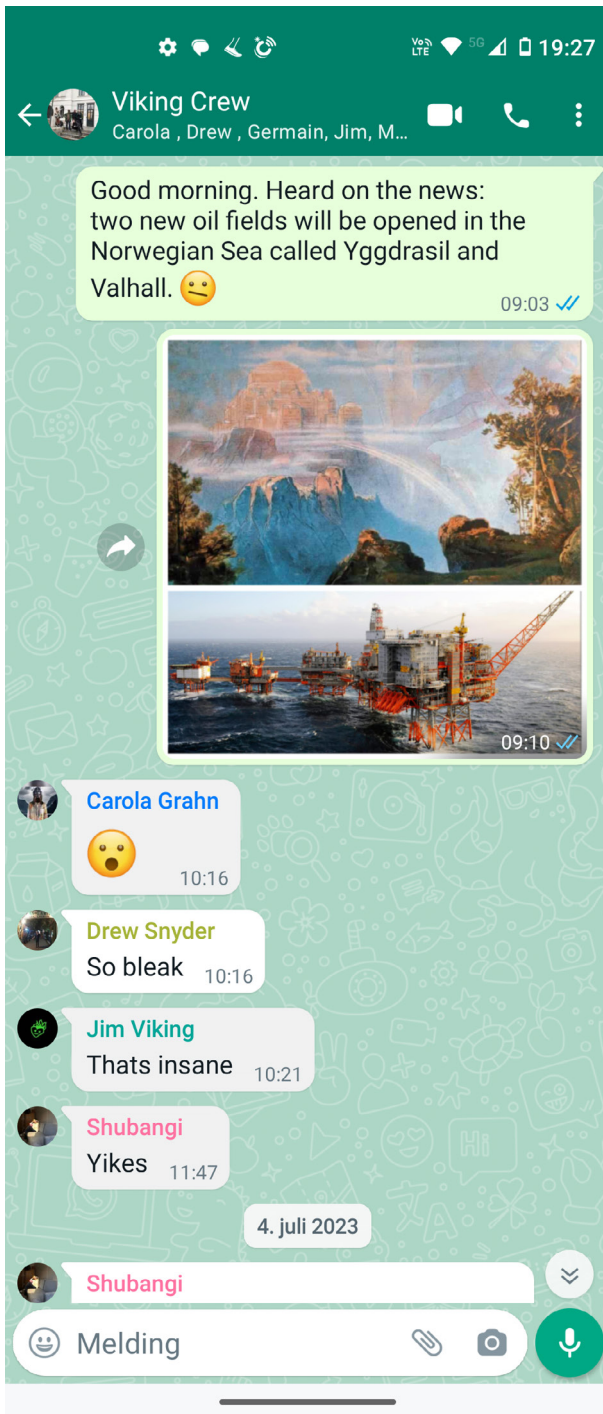


Snippets from the artists and curators' group chat. The is also a group chat just for the artists, but you won't get to see that.





We use the group to talk about the project, lots of logistics and what have you, but also current events, particularly when they might relate to the Vikings.



German smaller works. maybe spread around but one object in the museum.

streamlined like the ships - modern version.

minimalist

volume that is not visible - doesn't exist in the museum.

wear a response to the ship

the decision of how it was - doesn't have front or back

coming down in scale

human size - not monumental

materials: painted steel - Viking ship

smaller objects - durability - bronze - less restriction

empty - what are they saying?

the sledge - what did the Vikings bring back?

recording of the sledge

an object that questions something

is it enough with these historical people - monumental

the helmet

some ideas from 1100 by materials they found - their and other

did the text about the same and Viking long objects

3 more times online / meet physically

2 = 14th January?

15. January

JIM still early in the process. - also about the discussions - have been reading a lot about the Viking age.

NOT make something political - too strong. - want to be left alone but this time maybe it's the time to go full-on: ??? visualize the colors. ... - the colors are gone

OUTSIDE -

where the ships are supposed to be.

Bjornida

Athesbygge

by the museum

the helmet

colorful work.

outside

go up in scale

symbolic work.

monumental.

or small

Colonization by reformation

when built

Viking time

Slavians

Scandinavian people

Spain

Wiking-Zentrum

male on male masculinity

article about

save

use of glass - iron - steel etc

3 more times online / meet physically

2 = 14th January?

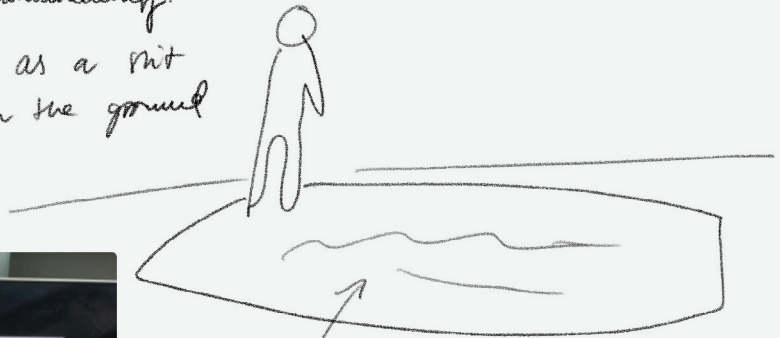
15. January

Sketchpad notes

Shubhangi

Abscenting or antimemorializing.

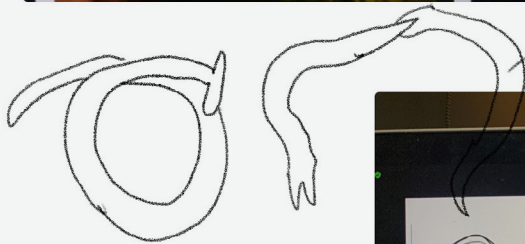
- A hole as a pit in the ground



a terrain of something heavy that has been removed.

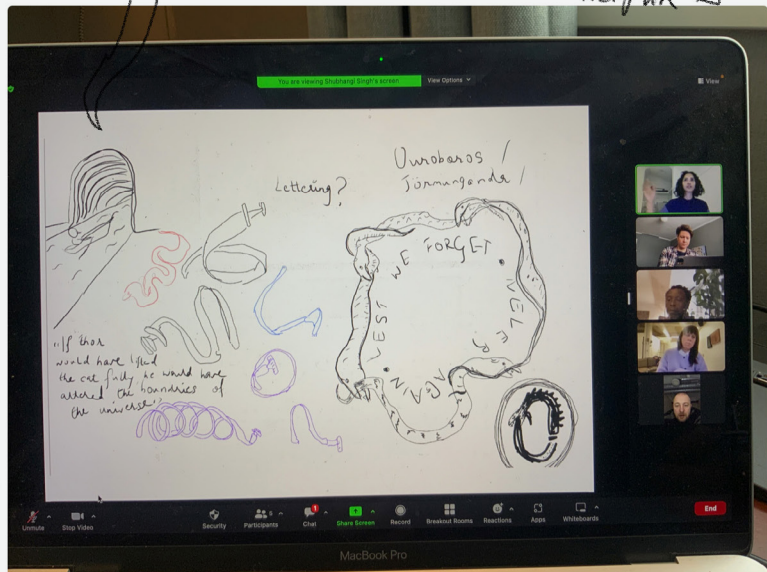
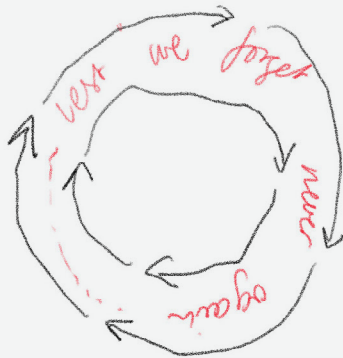
The impression of what an object leaves....

+ text work:

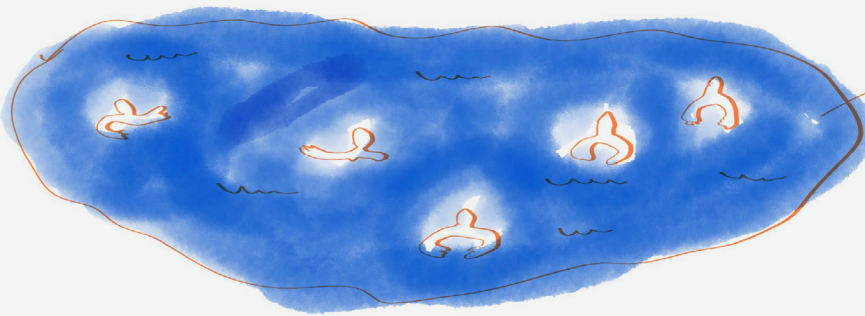


midgardromen

* RAGNAROK
Netflix



the power of the collective
✓
having each others backs.



the document
like a sea
that we are all
swimming in.

Can we
keep those ideas for later?
Have one in September/October?
Or have many ideas...
Keep them all alive

fountain:

What is the
role? of us?
working more as
no we are as
artists?



Seen on one of our visits to the building site. The object there is a drill bit they are using to dig a tunnel to the sea, as part of the energy system in the new museum.



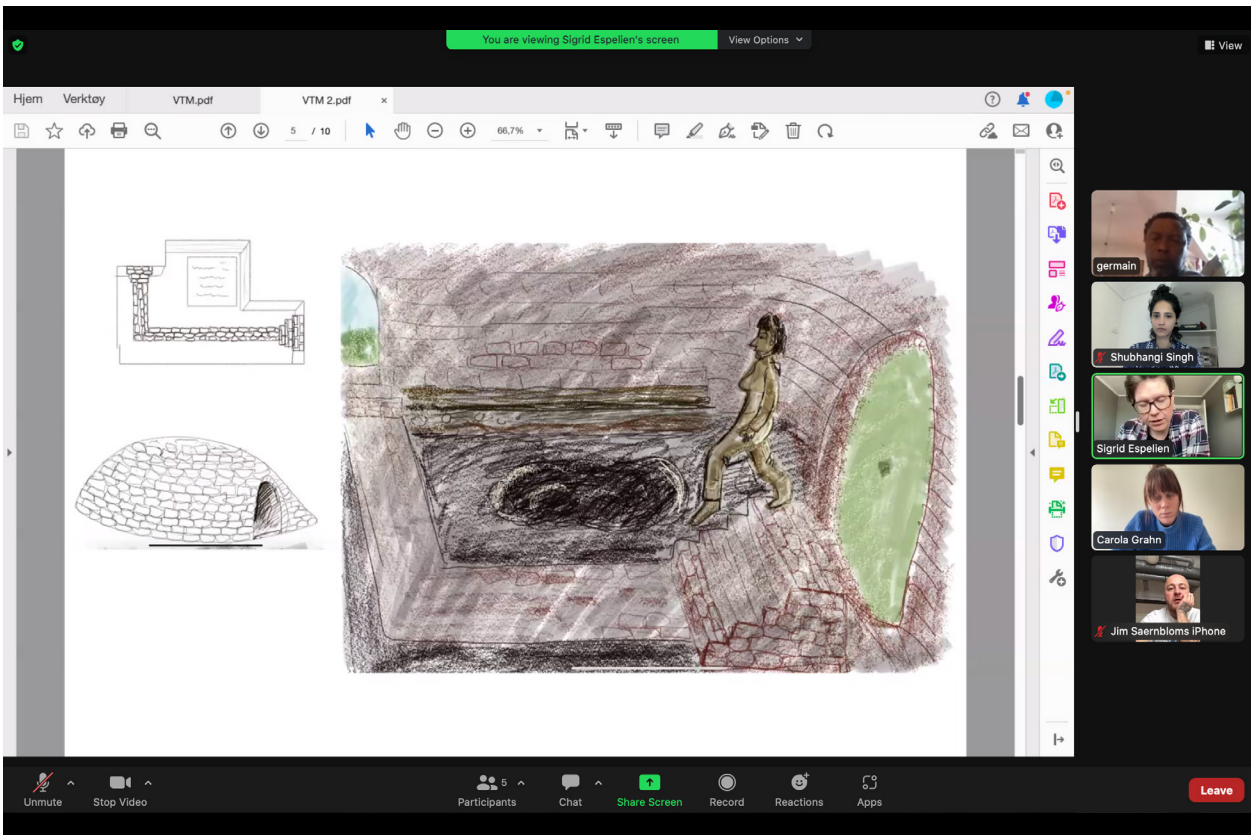
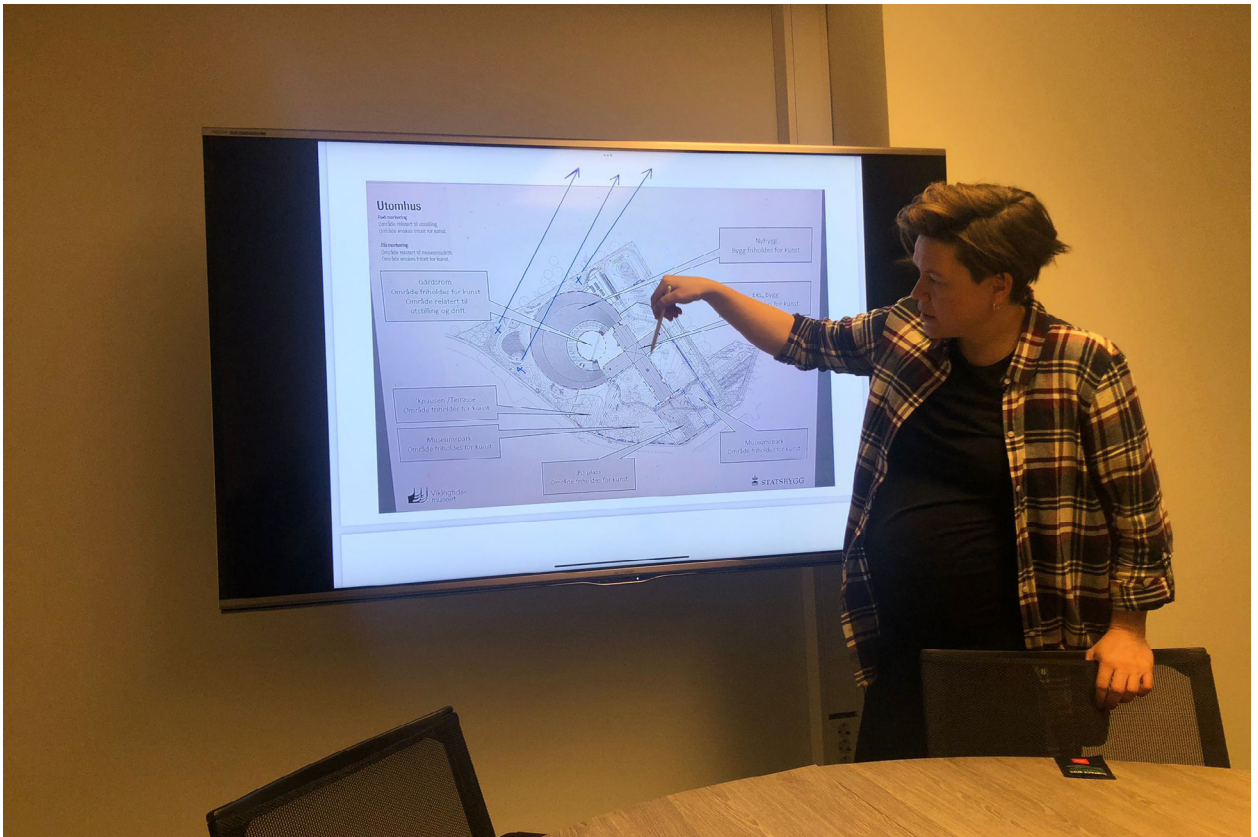
Top: the gang posing in front of KOROs office on 4 November 2022, from left Shubhangi, Germain, Sigrid, Carola and Jim.
Bottom: a visit to Kulturhistorisk museum and the wonderful Ellen Marie Næss, who taught us a lot about the Viking Age and the museum. We have no idea who the guy in the red stripe shirt is.



September 2023, during one of our last site visits.
Top: we're standing in front of the old Arnstein Arneberg building,
from left is Thomas from AART, Sigrid, Mechu, Shub, Germain, Drew,
Jim, Carola and Pernille.



Top: the gang outside Oslo City Hall, from left Jim, Sigrid, Shubhangi, Mechu, Carola and Germain.
Bottom: is from a meeting at KORØ.



Sigrid presenting her work in person and online



Vikingtidsmuseet (Viking Ship Museum),
2023

Introduction

Sjøkongens stier, havets hester og hendenes ild*

* Jorge Luis Borges' *Den norrøne litteratur* ('Antiguas literaturas germánicas'), Cappelens Uopulære Skrifter, 1969. The Sea King's paths, the sea's horses and the fire of the hands are metaphors for the ocean, for ships and for the sun.

So, I got a phone call that filled me with that same excited anxiety you feel when you check your bank account and discover that you have less money than you thought, like almost nothing, and you feel shocked but also get a feeling of a new beginning, the starting from scratch, endless possibilities rocket in your ass, new times ahead feeling, as opposed to a filled bank account with stuffed belly and no further visions other than getting rid of the money again, starting with getting the most expensive café latte and a very luxurious belt. ANYWAYS, the phone call was pretty unpleasant, not because of the person speaking, but because the sun was burning my eyes and shoulders, no clouds in sight, just the sun, alone, by itself. I was on an island waiting for a ferry with my partner, she is terrified of spiders and as I was talking on the phone, I looked into the old waiting shack to find some shade and it was covered, the entrance was covered with a spider's web, so big it was impossible to get in to the room. And in the middle of the net, standing very still, of course, the mother of all spiders I have seen in the last years. I had to distract my partner, I made her look for the ferry so we could make signs, as we were the only people there, us and that spider, and we were so small, so 'we must look for the ferry, because if not, it will pass!' And all of this was happening in the background, in the foreground was the voice telling me that in a new museum with over 40,000 objects, the biggest collection of 'stuff' from the Viking Age in the world, they wanted public artworks. It all seemed very impossible and the ferry was nowhere to be seen, I always forget to get sunglasses.

I had just been reading Snorre Sturlason in the little house we had stayed in on the island, because every day it had been raining, brutal rain, horrific and very violent winds, it was a lot of rage and probably revenge. One night the lightning even struck the little house. I had been wanting to read Snorre for a long time, and so it was there, on the shelf, my partner looked at books with birds and I read Snorre out loud. In the beginning I thought it was very much like the Old Testament, one name after another, mostly men. The drawings were awesome, never understood why the Old Testament didn't have illustrations.

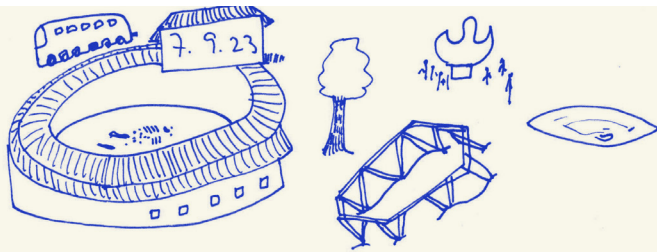
I explained to the voice on the phone I had read Snorre just now, it was a coincidence, but I was very into it! I was then told that there was a group, we were five artists, so it was four more: Germain Ngoma, Shubhangi Singh, Carola Grahn and Sigrid Espelien. It was us. And everything was open from here. So the ferry finally came, and we were still talking on the phone, and that was when the excited anxiety set in. Before it had just been anxiety. Now it was excited.

I was thinking a lot about these 40,000 plus items. The ships and the artefacts. Their presence is so strong, was it possible or even desired to add anything to the museum at all? The visitors go out to the museum to see Scandinavian history, not contemporary art. It was both a curse and a blessing how all these objects are so similar to art being made today. Not only that, but their vibes being so ancient, whether the craft is amazing or not, gives out a vibrant glow that makes their mere presence mythical. They are an entrance, they are dead but they are access to life, history, to time. But they were never made for that purpose (of course). At the time they were made, they had value in their specific function, they were necessary. Now, free from this, they come to live for themselves. All the information we draw from them is a side effect. But even then, just merely looking at them, from the smaller items to the ships, spending time with them, there is something else. They exist, not for what they existed for before, or the function they had, but just for themselves. And as science finds them enormously important as a language of their own, they were still not made for this, and between this, and the function they were made to have, there is an empty space. Even the art objects from that time are released from their past meaning and audience (who they were made for, whether gods or humans). This is not to say that art should be passive, on the contrary this empty room activates the viewer, as opposed to stuffing us. All art needs this empty space for us to fill. That is what art is.

So all these 40,000 objects will be inside. And the new museum is great. The hypermodern museum is shaped as a reptile, a timeless snake that coils around, starting and ending in the old

museum that was built in the 1920s. Made by Danish architects, it is form, lighter materials, spacious, elegant, heavy. There's a lot going on. There is an open patio in the middle, and outside you can walk around the museum. Even if you don't have money, you can walk around. I think that specifically appealed to the group, that the art placed around the museum can be experienced for free. The plans show trees and pathways. Can contemporary art ground the visitor? Before or after entering the old world. Can we connect with the past and bring something back? It does not have to be said in words what that might be. Or maybe it can. A true sense of time itself.

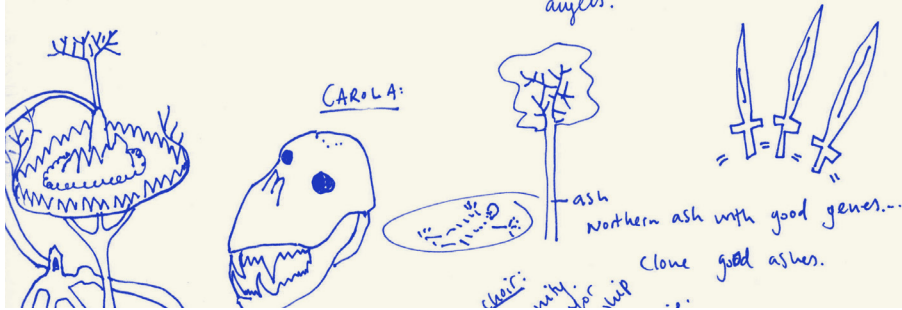
– *Jim Særnblom*



Sauvette - archaeologist researcher - Viking age
 Martin - public services museum, editorial board ...
 Kari - Kultural historie - stand in for Eken Marie. working in the exhibition project.
 Jan Bill? - danish - archaeologist - curator of the viking ship collection
 academic content of the exhibition.

GERMAIN
 the idea of the viking ship. As a capsule.
 Time capsule
 The shape. moving in space
 Stainless steel.
 Futuristic. "Viking-futurism"
 than in water.
 Mirror polished. Reflection. Projectile. A weapon.
 comments:
 A sense of isolation. Lonely.

Time Capsule - but things are moving. - horizon impression - hidden from some angles.



From Sigrid's sketchbook

A dialogue on process,
the sun and an empty map
Jim & Shubhangi

Jim

So, it's been pretty dark here for the whole of December, the sun came back this week, and I didn't really notice how much I was missing it until I saw it. The first day I had to climb a mountaintop (not high, scared of heights.) because it was so low on the skyline. I saw the glow before I came to the top, and it was like meeting an old friend again and realising how unique and funny and original that person is, and how much you love them. And I was thinking about the texts I have written for this project, and most of them have some kind of connection to the sun, the Vikings called it 'the fire of the hands'. I mean, it's very natural with the one that is specifically connected to my own project (*If the light takes us*), because the Vikings used the same type of stone as the sculpture will be made of, to navigate the sea. To find the sun's position on cloudy days, they let the crystals in the stone guide them to find where the light came from, so they could use their compasses again (which were pretty similar to ancient Egyptian compasses). But anyway, out here on this island where I am living now, surrounded by the sea, it is those elements: the ocean, waves, the sun and the stones, the reefs coming up from the sea. It's very violent, so you need the light to soften it a bit.

Shubhangi

The sun is a funny element. So truly necessary that its chokehold on us is frightening. Perhaps understandably then, the one true god to worship, as it has been across cultures and time. Actually, maybe water too. The rivers? Ah, I don't know. Never mind, perhaps no one deserves to be worshipped. Reverence is overrated. Nothing exists altruistically, for the sake of anyone or something else, everything just simply exists for its own sake. So no god requires a mention here. Fuck that.

Though the use of the sun for navigation is a whole other skill that I would love to have in my life.

I wonder if there is a masterclass of sorts that teaches the use of the sun as a life skill. Last year, I was lost in Sydney's dreadful bush for over two hours. I was alone and annoyingly confident with very little experience of how to navigate this super confusing bushland. I was not far from home, how could I be lost? That's ridiculous. I had heard a million tales about people getting lost where their families and rangers had to deploy helicopters to look for the lost folks. After two hours of not finding my way out (and the sun almost setting), I realised that my chances of finding my way out of there were fast dwindling. Considering I am writing to you from the comfort of my home, it is safe to say that I did make it out but not without some battle scars. It was a terribly humbling experience. That's when I thought how helpful it would have been to know how to read the sun for navigation, I would have known which way was home and I would have had the chance to leave with my dignity intact.

Jim

I had to google 'Sydney's dreadful bush' and it looks pretty open? How terrible to be lost in an open landscape. (HUGE digression, this came up from the google search 'Sydney's dreadful bush' too, I don't know what's worse). [Image redacted. Redacted image description: a young, caucasian person with dreadlocked hair posing amongst the Hornsby bushland.]

I know, if there is something to worship, it must be nature. But how sad to have to take a weekend class (or worse, evening classes) to learn about how to navigate in nature, especially for a middle-aged man. This island where I'm living now is so small, but it's surrounded by endless sea of course, with a view out to the Atlantic. I'm scared of going out on the sea, I'm constantly being invited out, the old guys here want to fish and chat. Maybe it won't happen. Maybe it's about pride. But I'm happy just to watch.

Shubhangi

I'll send you a photo of the bushland I am referring to on WhatsApp. It's hardcore. I am not. I feel like I dodged a proverbial bullet that day. There must indeed be a god.

I think I would, one hundred per cent, take the opportunity of a class on navigating nature with the help of the sun and stars. It is knowledge that I know I might never really need – seems so basic but useless, I truly desire it. Though I wonder if it enters the realm of doomsday preppers. I bet it does. Doomsdayers and survivalists. Imagine signing up to a course to study navigation without tools and ending up becoming a target group to whom expensive survival kits are marketed. Another level of profiting from uselessness. I have often wondered if I would ever survive one of those zombie attacks, if they were to take place. Let's be realistic, no way would I make it through. I am not equipped for it – I am not athletic, don't possess the grit nor do I have the least bit of arm strength to carry any weapon. I do not intend to hide, strategise and fight while constantly being on the run. Sounds exhausting, no? Not interested. No chance.

I think you should take up that fishing offer. Even if you did it just once. Aren't you curious what the old folks talk about while being stuck in the middle of the sea for hours? Do it for me. Be my ears and eyes into this subculture. Not trying to romanticise it, but just curious about it. You can think of this as being undercover. Who knows? Maybe you'd even end up really liking the activity. You might even become a double agent – giving them the goss on the Norwegian art and literary scene. Spilling the beans on a certain museum that you may or may not have some insider's information on.

Jim

I want to change my name, I want to change my dialect. I'm so weak, my hands are small. I'm very scared they will see all that, it's not something I want to show, I'm from the city, I was born and raised in Oslo, it's a very ugly place. I was in Copenhagen recently, it's oh so pretty. My colleague said it was no wonder, for 400 years all the money and resources in Norway basically just floated steadily down to Denmark, leaving us behind, stuck with rocks and fish. I know what you mean, I would kill if the apocalypse came, I would attack, I would hide too, but I would be exhausted very quickly.

About the boat, are you crazy?! Being seasick, explaining the Norwegian art scene, puking and being a double agent all at the same time?! And pulling up fish and telling jokes. I am happy to simply watch, I guess that's why I'm an artist. Besides, I already feel like a double agent sometimes,

being a trans person. A vulnerable minority! Haha. Oh God. Dear God.

There have been storms here for several days now by the way, the waves have been up to 25 metres high. We had to buy food and store water for a week, and the electricity was even gone. The water from the tap turned black. It's funny we have talked about all this, and just now I made the connection. How odd. I'm a bit curious about your background? We have been working together for a while now, and you didn't mention much about your past. None of us have.

Shubhangi

Yeah, you are probably right. The returns from being an undercover agent in that sense are far and few. The idea of being out in the sea and being 'found out' sounds legitimately frightening. My heart begins to palpitate at the very thought of it. Sure, we can just watch them from the comfort of our homes, while we eat our warm, shop-bought pike. Though I wonder if in your sea-sickness hallucinations, you'd merge the sea waves with 'the wave' of your proposed work. Imagine seeing a block of your own sculpture, in its cartoon-like wave pattern, amidst the sea. Have you ever dreamed of it, by the way? I forgot to ask the others too, if they have dreamed of their works yet. Talking about dreams is so corny. And kind of boring. But I had dreamed of the rig not too long ago. The metal rig had transformed into a hedge maze-like structure. With a soundscape playing through speakers within. I know this because I had woken up from the dream and made a note of it on my phone. I thought I was receiving some kind of divine wisdom, some spiritual message from the world beyond, that wants to 'deliver' the work to its eternal form. Turns out it was a mere stress response. Besides, can you imagine seeing another labyrinth as an artwork? Where are we? In the Hamptons?!

(Quick side note: speaking of Denmark, hedge mazes were very popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in castle/manor premises. As stations of pride? Entertainment for bored aristocrats? Keeping royal gardeners busy and employed? I don't know what the motivation could possibly be. It is believed that a Danish prince, who had paid a visit to a Danish castle's hedge maze, was so fascinated by it that he borrowed a blueprint of that maze and had a similar one made in the Hamptons. Of course, if it were to be in any other part of the world, they would have simply dug the dirt that the entire labyrinth stood on and transported it to one of their museums. The trees got lucky in that sense. And rocks too. No wonder Norway was left behind with theirs).

I think we have a few more (foreseeable) years of hanging together. We can discuss our backgrounds more the next time we see each other. It might be the nature of this project, that we are always looking forward into the future and not spending enough time talking about any of our personal pasts – which is an irony, given how much time we spend discussing a collective and historical past. Guess this is the collateral consequence of viewing something through a macro lens, while the micro goes undiscovered, or it simply feels too irrelevant.

The next time we meet, let's set aside some time to check with each other and the rest of the gang about our backgrounds (or the parts that we'd like to disclose). Thanks for the thought!

Hope the storm on the island (and your heart) settles down soon and the boat, so to speak, steadies.

Shubhangi

I will be leaving for Riga early tomorrow, travelling a good portion of the day (ferry + bus) and you are travelling most of today? I am so glad to be born in the age of remote communication where I can be in motion and still be able to speak to others miles away — in real time too! Still all a bit wild to this 80s baby. Can you imagine how this would have sounded to people 60 years ago? Complete hocus-pocus. We would have perhaps been institutionalised, or worse, burned at the stake, if we had as much as uttered that we can hear voices from far away. Maybe the only good thing from it all is that there is no Instagram in solitary confinement.

I had been thinking of your proposal and specifically, how brass inlays are so subtly beautiful. I am such a sucker for them, Carola. What is it about them that makes them so endearing? Is it their resemblance to gold? Or the fact that we see something shiny in a place we don't often expect to? Like the floor or part of a fixed architecture, and lose our minds? This made me think that I haven't seen much brass inlay in concrete. Maybe at an occasional train station somewhere, but not much. Maybe exposed concrete is considered too brutal, too much of an acquired taste to welcome something that is considered 'pretty' to its club. But that couldn't be it. That's too reductive. I searched for images to satisfy my urge to see some examples right at this moment. And oh god. I stumbled upon some tiles (of course they were tiles, interior design rules brass inlay with an iron fist); but the tiles made my heart skip a beat. I hated being so attracted to them so instantly. I felt so predictable in that moment, that I could be so easily enchanted. I felt played. I wish I was harder to please.

Carola

Shubhangi, I am sorry you had to wait for my reply longer than expected, I am tired and a bit slow today and as you already know, I'm on the train.

60 years ago, that would have been 1964. I imagine that to have been a very positive and forward looking time in Sweden. A quick googling is letting me know that the Swedish economy was exceptionally good, apparently the years between the 1940s and 70s are called 'the record years' referring to the rapidly growing wealth. Childcare allowance was raised from 150 SEK to 700 SEK and that I find quite remarkable since socialism and its ideas about equality are quite unfashionable in Sweden nowadays, how quickly it can change. So I believe people would have had faith in the future then, being quite capable of imagining all kinds of inventions. In 1964, my mother was nine years old, I am curious, what was India and your own family like at that time?

Regarding my proposal of a bear grave sculpture, it is funny that you are letting me know you like the brass in concrete at this very moment when it is slightly shapeshifting in my head. But you are right, it can be very beautiful, I do hope so in the end. I am not sure I understand why you are so reluctant toward beauty? Are you afraid it could disconnect your rationality? Or may it be because beauty, in our time, has been so tied up in consumption that you would like to set yourself apart from that? That I could relate to. Having said that, lately, I have come to think of beauty as having a value of its own. I am trying harder now to consider it a part of my work, but I must say, it doesn't come as easily to me as it does to some artists, I am too caught up in the ideas and symbolism of things. Thinking about that, and your own project, I have been wondering how you will make it yours? I am sensing a struggle with it that I find interesting, am I wrong?

Shubhangi

Ah, you are touching the very nerve of my struggle with beauty. Your questioning of it instantly wants me to defend my love for all things beautiful, but I

know that you already know that and hence, it needs no further explanation. Beauty is a strange concept now that I think about it. It can be just everything that one focuses one's attention on (well, maybe not everything. Definitely not everything). But time might be a factor to consider in approaching what is or isn't beautiful, I reckon. I had been working with dust for instance, and while many would find it unworthy of their attention or unremarkable, to me dust is gorgeous. It opens up a whole universe of data and knowledge — and just wild and aesthetic beauty. It contains details and nuances that I realise exist even outside or despite me, but it exists to me because of my relationship with it (that is, because of my time + my attention). This is all just to say that I find the urge to look beyond the apparent not because I am opposed to beauty but rather, because I tend to fall for it far too easily and I know that there is a universe beyond, only if I decide to look. Which is hard again because I am so easily smitten by shiny things. I am quite fish-brained that way. You can hook me and reel me in by flashing a glimmering object in my general direction. Hence, the skepticism to the 'obvious beauty'— it's dangerous (to me). There should really be a slogan like stranger danger but for shiny beauty. It Shiny/You Runny? Glimmer-ing/Swim-away? Gold/Not Sold? This needs some workshopping. Let's circle back later.

I guess the struggle with the proposed work isn't really how to make it mine. I am not worried about ownership (though I don't think you mean that either), but rather the timelines. I recognise myself to be a (proud) slow worker and therefore, also need a lot of time to ponder over every step. I am afraid that the timelines would push me to make quick decisions, which I'll be honest, is not my strength. Quick decisions somehow feel too absolute, you know? I think you know ...

What's your train carriage like? Do you have someone on the seat next to you? Do you think they tried to sneakily read your email? Did you get any clues about who they might be/what they do yet? Have YOU tried taking a sneak at their computer? Their clothes? The wallpaper on their phone? Any interesting interactions on the train yet?

Carola

I didn't know you dread quick decisions, maybe because I perceive you as a quick thinker, but I guess it doesn't have to be a contradiction. I find it tricky to fit art-making into the systems of society today. Many times, artists are expected to act like entrepreneurs and show up with an idea, a plan of how to produce it together with a marketing kit and a guarantee of durability. Sometimes, I feel the magic of an idea has vanished after being pinned down and

scrutinised in an art plan, it's like I've already made it in my head, without the actual joy and experience of having gone through the process. I don't know how to avoid it and still get paid! I wish I could simply say, 'I don't know but trust me, it will be astonishing!' Haha.

I'm not on the train anymore, I fell asleep and now I'm back home. But you, are you in Riga? I imagine you are sitting on an outdoor patio with your notebook and an espresso, like any dreamer in early spring weather. It's not likely though, since it's early February and quite cold, but imagination is wonderful in that way isn't it?! I like your suggested exercise amongst strangers, since my own biggest interest is relationships (any type) I often challenge myself with guessing how people belong together. Last summer I was sure I figured out the structure of a family next to us on the beach. A dominant, incessantly talking mother, with three grown-up children and their spouses and kids. According to my theory: two beautiful sisters with everything sorted, good looking husbands and well-behaved offspring. At least one of them must have gone through therapy sorting out the assumed problematic relationship with their opinionated mother and both were probably struggling with 'good girl' syndrome. And then the younger brother with beer and pizza, maybe still living at home ... a different kind of struggle. But then again, prejudices are dangerous.

Shubhangi

Prejudice is dangerous, you are not wrong, though not entirely avoidable. We are all products of prejudices — completely to our own detriment, of course. But when we are aware of these prejudices, they can act like a mirror to us. Kind of inconvenient, no? Perhaps there is a way to observe but not judge. Non-conclusive and non-invasive anthropology, if that is even possible. Anyway, you are allowed to jump to conclusions this year – it's a leap year!

I personally don't mind making, revisiting and revising art plans. There is certainly an 'intuition' that we work with and from, no doubt, but sometimes that just isn't enough. Convictions can be malleable, that should have the opportunity to be shaken loose. Otherwise they are at the danger of becoming almost dogmatic. For me, revisiting my own proposals can be a way of seeing what has remained steadfast and what has shed away. The more the shedding, the more refined my ideas promise to get. I never wish to fortify myself (or my work) from these critical reflections, regardless of where or whom they are coming from. The other day in Riga, I was sitting in a bar with a few old and new friends after an opening when a person who claimed to be a regular at that bar decided to make himself at

home with our group, loudly talking to (at) us and asking stuff about us, including being fairly sexist at various points either out of habit, compulsion, ignorance or to provoke? My general impulse would have guided me to shut him down but I was so proud of myself that I didn't have any such urge. I chose to ignore him and just let his ideas wash over me without letting it really affect me. I realise that in picking my battles, I was preserving my energy for places or with people who are deserving of it and I was so chuffed with myself at that point. Mainly because I know that until recent times, I would have locked horns. Is this a form of growth or have I lost the fire that has been my fuel? I don't know. I realise that I have now forgotten the point I was trying to make with this long-winded anecdote.

By the way, I noticed a beautiful example of brass inlay on concrete in a beautiful, old building in Riga. I thought of you then. My phone had run out of battery earlier that evening so you will have to just take my word for it :)

Hi again Germain!

Hope you are having a good day. I'm sitting in my new (!) studio office in Holmestrand, at something called the Peter Pan Factory (!!). It used to be a sardine factory but now there are office spaces, production spaces and workshops for startups, artists, designers and a food supplier. I will have this office for now, and from the summer a studio where I can work with clay and ceramics as well and make a mess! It feels good to have shorter travelling time to work at least one or two days a week. These days, I'm trying to get more into the details on the project. Like the dimensions of the underground space. And if the bedrock can be used as flooring. The bedrock at the museum site is Ordovician shale and nodular limestone, and from what I understand, that is fossilised marine clay from around 450 million years ago. 🐟 And those lime balls are from skeletons of sea creatures from that time. It would be amazing to have the 'young' clay from the last Ice Age right next to this old relative, no? And maybe bricks made from the excavated clay from the hole as well, like a contemporary fossil in a way. Yes, all of this is what I'm getting into now.

How is your work coming along? I heard you were looking into some steel production place in Horten? That is maybe 20 minutes from where I am now, and even closer to the Viking Museum at Borre, if you haven't been there yet. I didn't know that competence existed there, or anywhere in Norway? What is the material you're using again? Stainless steel? Will it be cast? Why did you want to use that exact material? It is a very sexy material. I was also wondering about something else, about how you use and think about materials in a more general sense. It seems like you have been working a lot with more ephemeral or soft materials like wax, paper, Styrofoam, clay, etc. in your previous work. Your sculpture for the Viking Museum is so hard, shiny and

finished, and the form is so whole and perfect in a way. How do you think about that work compared to that more porous work you have done previously? Are they two different logics? It would be cool to hear about this since I am such a materials nerd myself. And it seems like you are too.

Best
Sigrid

—

Hey Sigrid, thank you for your mail, sorry yesterday got so busy I couldn't get back to you. It was nice to hear about your new studio. It's great to have a place where you can freely think, play and develop your ideas. The image of earth on the 'kunstplan' cover is very beautiful, it made me think of your project, particularly the digging and exposing layers of earth, some undisturbed for ages. It's fascinating to imagine standing on a bedrock with 450 million years of history. I thought about how highlighting any fossils in the bedrock could offer striking contrast against the Ice Age clay layers and bricks. Next week I'm visiting a metal workshop in Sandefjord. I'm surprised and pleased to find the expertise we need locally, which means we don't have to look overseas like to China. The project will utilise stainless steel.

I chose it for its durability and minimal maintenance requirements, employing forging and welding. The material selection is very important in my work. Sometimes it drives the concept, while other times the material itself can spark the creative vision.

I'm drawn to ephemeral materials for their transformative nature and the freedom they give, valuing the conceptual essence over material value. For instance, the Viking ship sculpture was envisioned in

a futuristic form with stainless steel perfectly encapsulating the intended expression. In contrast, my work with porous materials often evolves in a fluid manner with ideas emerging organically during the creative process. I hope to hear from you soon.

Best
Germain

—

Hi again Germain!

Sandefjord it was! Okay, that's also close. It's great that they can do it in Norway. I'm thinking the capsule will be super in the museum or outside the museum, surrounded by so many old things. I remember one of the museum conservators, the one that showed us the sleds, told us they were conserved with something back in the day, when they didn't know too much about conservation, with something that made the wood even more fragile. That they were basically thin shells of wood with nothing inside. And in this setting the capsule becomes the ultimate contrast. The streamlined, hard super-object that also reminds us how objects stare back at us by constantly mirroring us. Right now, I imagine the sculpture like that monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. That people would travel to the museum in three thousand years to worship the capsule! Maybe it'll be the only thing left of the museum. Do you know how long it would take for stainless steel to break down?

I will consider this idea of marking or highlighting things in the bedrock floor! Maybe not with words but with something else. Like a red circle or a chiseled-out mark or something. Let's see.

If you're going by car to Sandefjord you should come by the Peter Pan Factory for a cup of coffee. I'll be working from there tomorrow and Wednesday this week. Crossing my fingers for the steel place to be good for what you want to do.

Okay, talk soon!
Sigrid

Hey Sigrid! I'm super happy to hear from you again. I hope you had a good weekend. Yes, the surface reflection was meant to mirror back the surrounding, also to deflect the massiveness of the object, to give it some kind of lightness. Actually I would love it to be set up in a neutral space, where it is just an object not associated with the Viking ship. Then like you say, maybe in three thousand years it will become an object of wonder. I'm not sure of the lifespan of stainless steel, but I'm sure it might be in the thousands of years, maybe not outlasting bronze metal. Thank you, I would have loved to stop by for a coffee but unfortunately we are travelling by train. I hope the new space will inspire you to great things.

Best
Germain



From Sigrid's sketchbook

imagine ~~the~~ different possibilities.

Changes the hierarchies of what is the art. An ode to conservatism
Questioning that glorification of the conservation.

Shub:

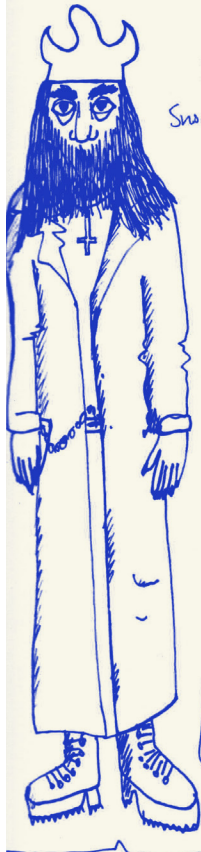
An ode to conservatism
↓
maybe not what she is

Halkov: Conserves time - This structure will be used for the ships...

How will this monument be perceived in 30-40 years? ~~How~~ ^{Shub:} Every monument is a time capsule... from that time...

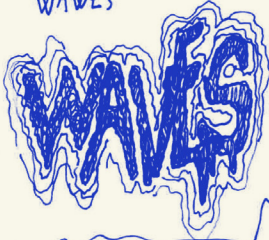
The ng as a holder for protection our national identity. ~~It's~~ Absent

JIM:



Black metal - viking age obsessed.
Surre sagas.
Halfdan Egeirsson. - gag

WAVES



Manime:
Seidr

↓
female power.

active for
of energy to
place....

Odin - queer. associ with
- Powerful and dangerous. -

Tapestries from Oseberg: scene where people are Seidr

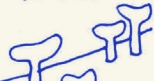
Carola:

hemism
bear seremonies - large story both present and lost. How the bones are structured, feast, shaman. Humans being married to bears - transformed to bears.

How to talk about those subjects...

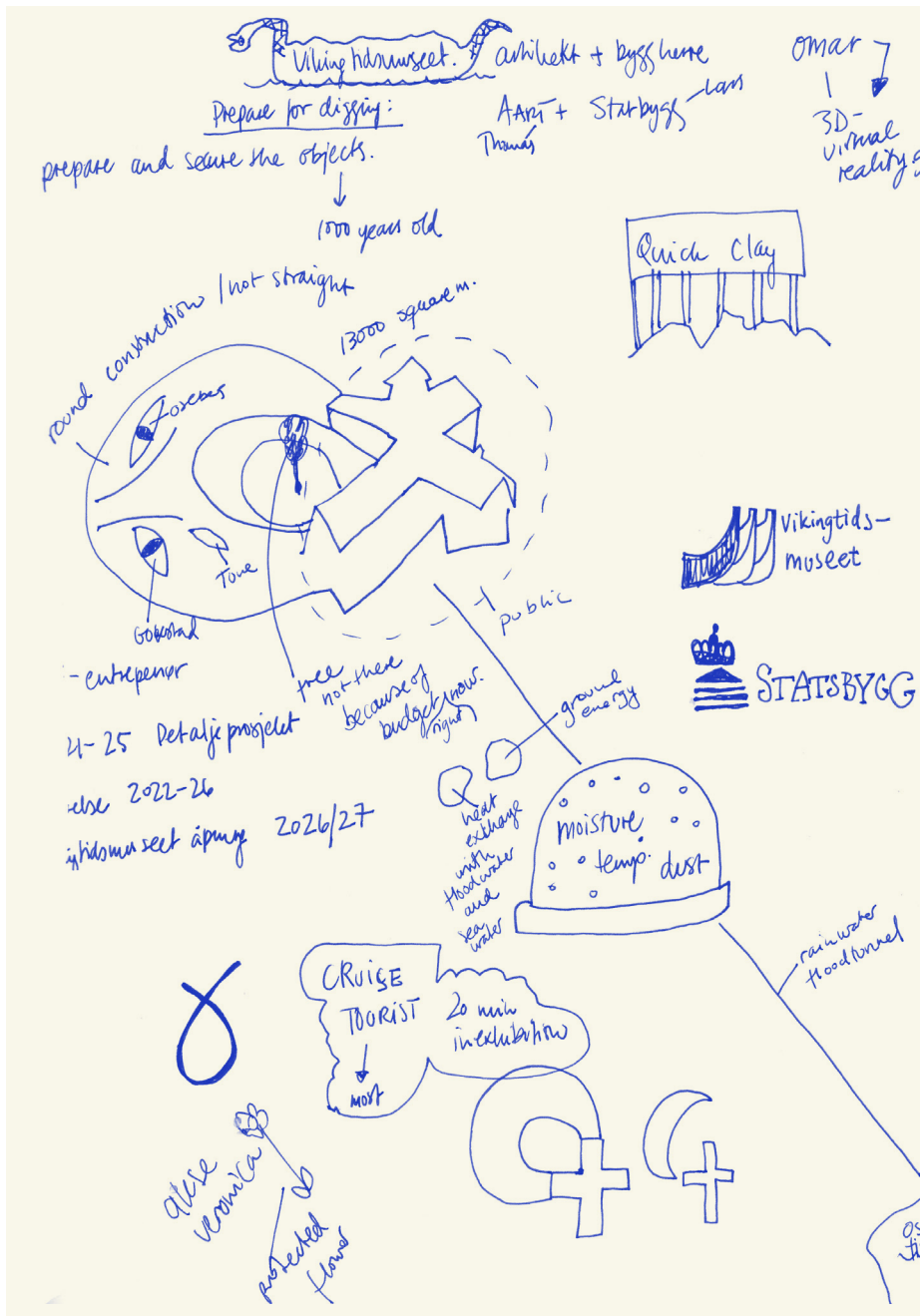
Animism in the work. Yggdrasil. speaks right into that. Gods could appear as humans... Ash - woman ash - sick

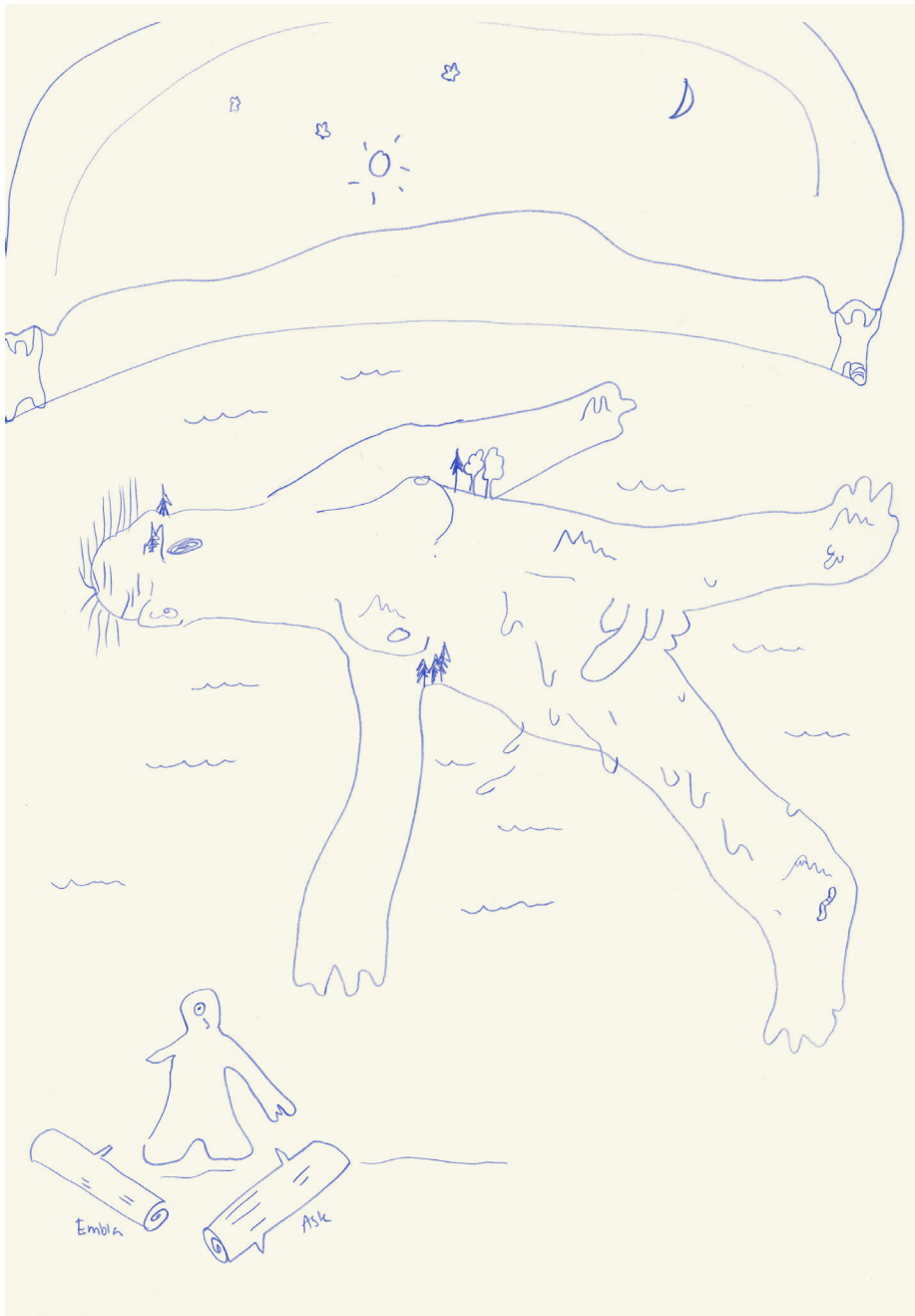
Manime: a bear man at Oseberg tapestry....



Halkov: seeing the vikings through differ
- lenses... Opening up and questioning

From Sigrid's sketchbook





From Sigrid's sketchbook

- WILLIAM BARROWS - FAVORITE AUTHOR (GERMAIN)

↓
designer Germain
book

(contra point youtube
channel)

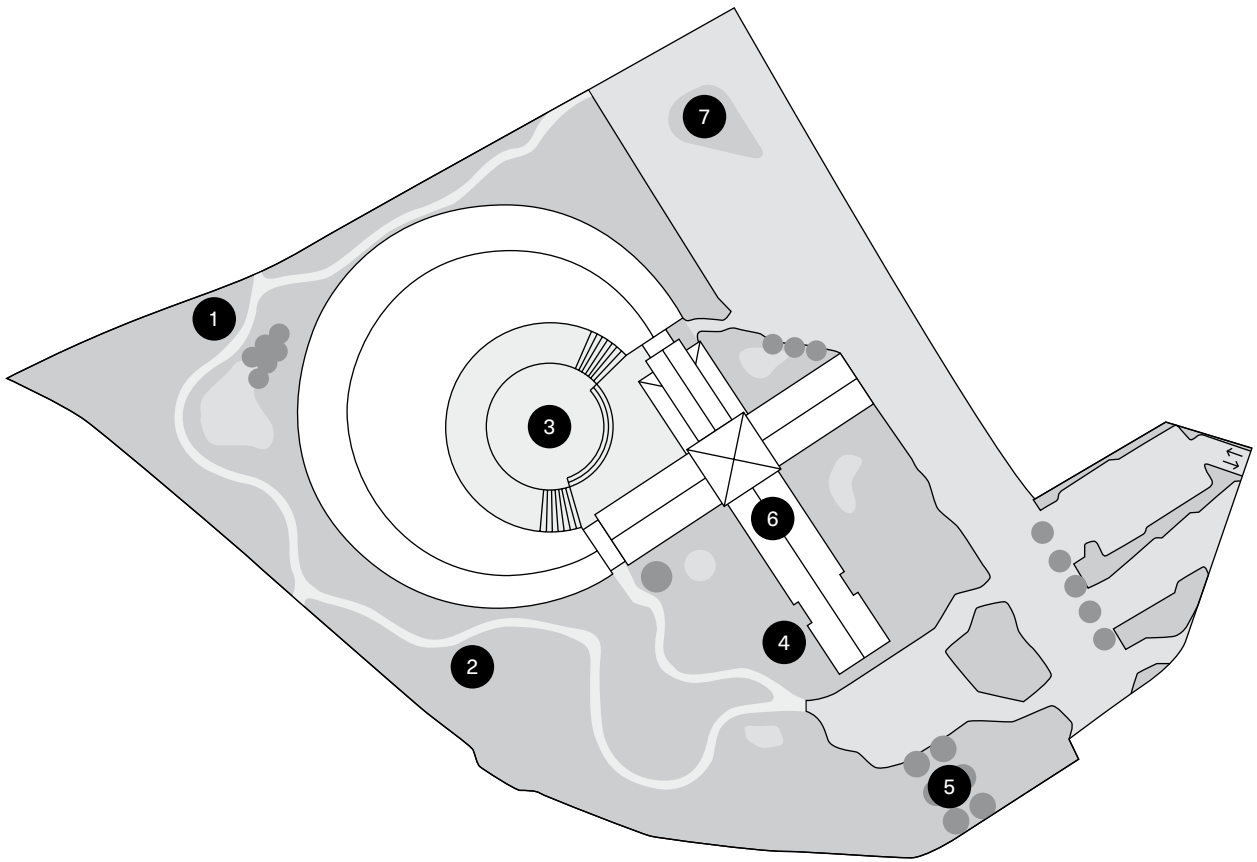
- GERMAIN, WHERE DO YOU KEEP ALL YOUR STUFF?

Barbara Hepworth *

→ Why is the thing so political

how is your work political
is everything political?

MAP



- 1 Shubhangi Singh
- 2 Jim Særnblom
- 3 Carola Grahn
- 4 Sigrid Espelien
- 5 Germain Ngoma
- 6 Elisabeth Haarr
- 7 The Ingstad Monument

Carola Grahn

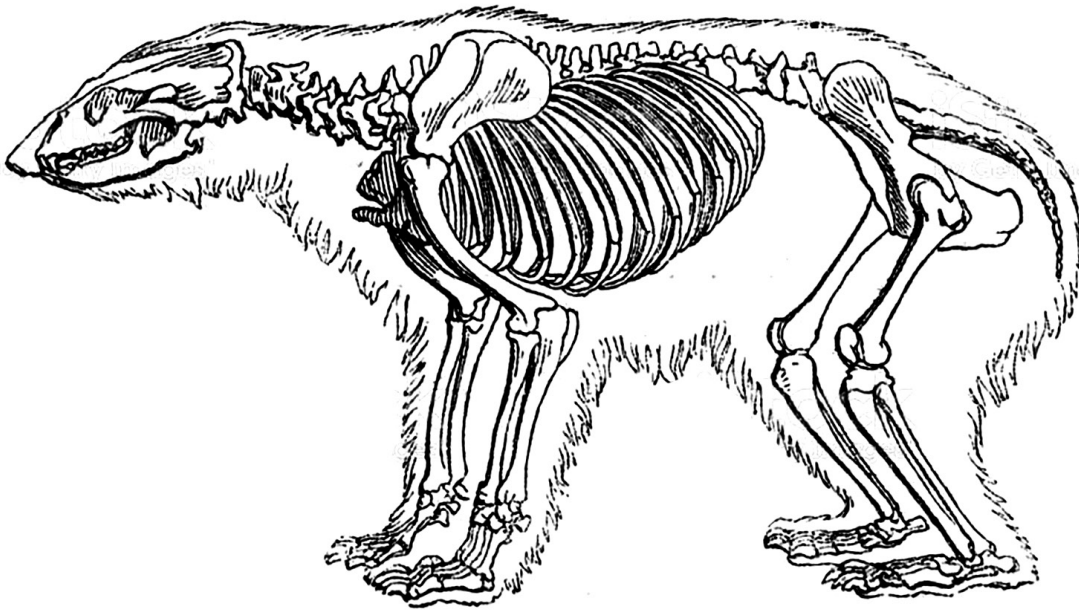
When our lives are
pearls in the hands of
strangers

Proposal

ForeBears

There are ancestors
with skeletons and
then there are
ancestors with no
skeletons, just a shoe and a hat
and then there are
ancestors with
nothing at all. No skeletons, no
history, no ancestors
at all

– *Jim Særnblom*



827.—Skeleton of Polar Bear.



Björngrav, Västerbotten

When our lives are pearls in the hands of strangers is a multi-component artistic proposal that explores how the Museum of the Viking Age, its collection, knowledge and so forth, can play a role in Scandinavia today. The overarching title aims to disrupt common subjective and temporal relationships within archaeological practice, asking us to imagine what it would be like to be the subject of an archaeological discovery of the future in which our lives and cultural practices are imperfectly or incorrectly understood.

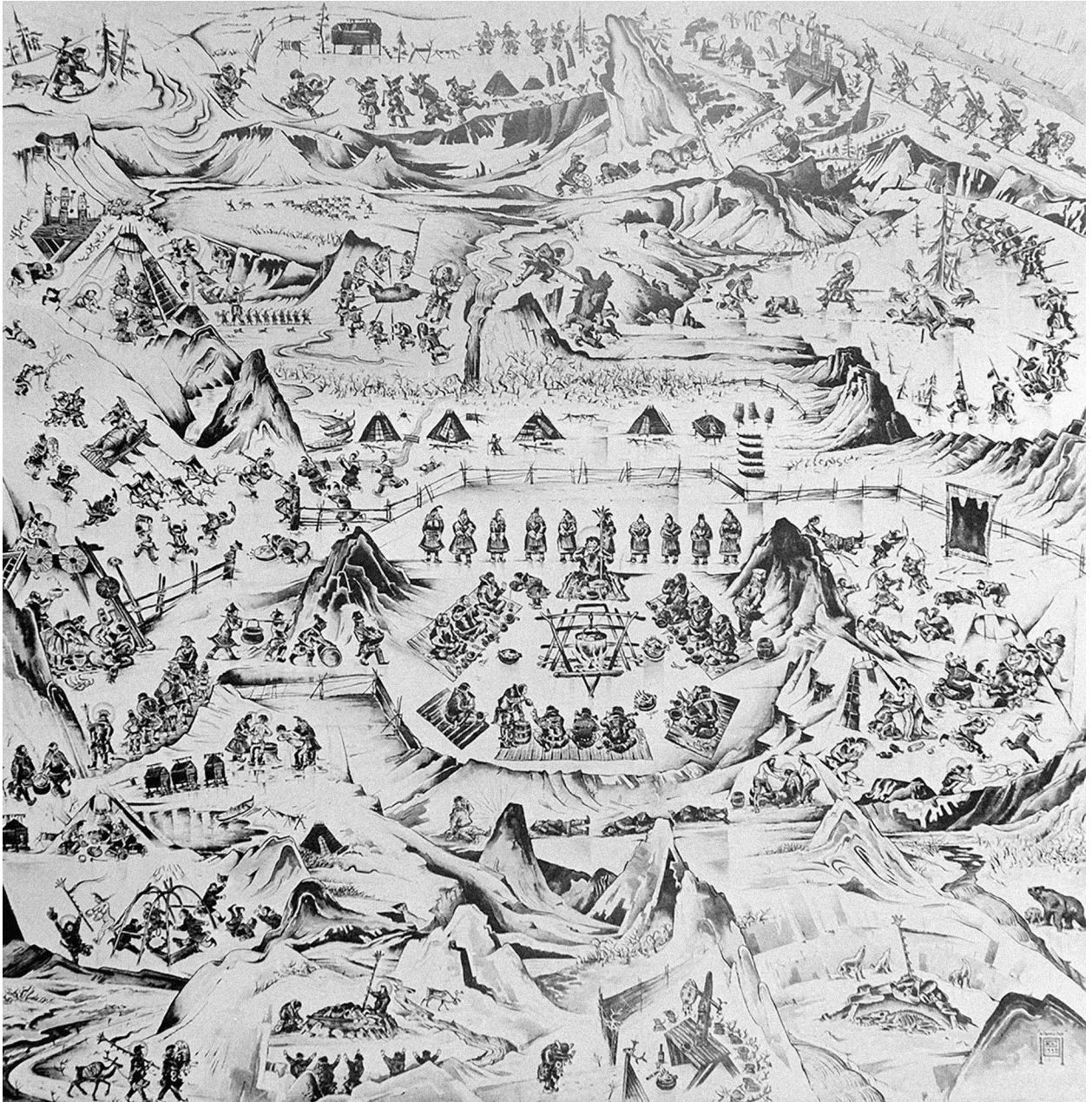
Broadly speaking the proposals go into dialogue with aspects of nationalism, gender and/or sustainability in ways that an archaeological museum might otherwise not be inclined towards. All of the components are proposed for the inner courtyard space of the museum's new building. I have focused on the inner courtyard as a space where people can meet for reflection and conversation, and am particularly drawn to the space as being outside of the museum, yet enclosed by it. It has resulted in a proposal in three parts: a bear grave sculpture centrally located in the middle of the inner courtyard, a bear feast performance and an ash tree integrated into a sculpture (the last part is optional and dependent on the overall development of the inner courtyard).

The proposal is dependent on functions and infrastructure in the courtyard which have per today been reduced. The reductions are reversible, and the museum has expressed a clear intention to realise the space as it is originally conceived, thus giving a basis for moving forward with planning these proposals as of now. The plans will however require adjustment if the museum is unable to realise the project as they foresee it. KORO is in dialogue with the museum leadership and building managers on behalf of the artist regarding a good solution to these risks.

BEAR GRAVE SCULPTURE

The first element in the proposal is a horizontally oriented, flat on the ground or slight relief sculptural work in the centre of the inner courtyard. Brass or bronze inlays can be seen in the form of a bear skeleton, a spear and a small brass ring. The work is imagined as a beautiful feature in the ground that refers to ancient Sami cultural praxis of bear feasts and bear burials in the north and is a reminder of the presence of Sami culture in Scandinavia before, during and after the Viking Age.

In pre-Christian times, the bear was considered sacred in Sami culture. The Bear Ceremony began before a bear was hunted and lasted until it was captured, slaughtered, eaten and buried. When the bear was killed, it was carefully skinned and cut up so that the skeleton was not damaged. After a feast, the bear's skeleton was carefully buried, complete and with the bones in order of a living bear. The Bear Ceremony is the largest remnant of pre-modern Sami culture, and the Sami are considered to be the only culture that performed this rite in the Nordic region. The graves found have been dated as far back as the Viking Age and earlier. The sculptural image in the ground of the inner courtyard refers to these grave findings, and is imagined constructed in either brass, bronze or aluminum, in relief or flat with the floor surface. An inscription pointing to the subject will be placed in relation to the sculpture. Precise sketch, text and appearance will be outlined at a later stage based on the completion of an expanded research phase in the first half of 2024. The following sketches are to be considered as examples.



Ossian Elgström, *Bjørnefesten* (Bear Feast), 1930. Norrbottens museum

BEAR FEAST PERFORMANCE

The Bear Feast performance is more experimental in nature. The core idea is to work with the story of the Sami Bear Feast. The project begins with a research period to learn more about the stories, how the feast was performed and what it means or can mean to Sami society today. The idea is that this research phase will culminate in a public performance, possibly with music, masks and costumes.

'FORPROSJEKT'

During the pre-project period, I collaborated with a male choir, a conductor and an actor to put together a ceremonial performance with masks, costumes and music, to be performed in a forest at Wanås Konst in Sweden. The goal was to explore pre-Christian ceremonies and a performance format that would engage the audience. This performance was held on 21 October 2023, and provided valuable experience that I hope to carry forward into the realisation of this part of the project.



Documentation from the ceremonial performance *Hupehensis* at Wanås Konst, Sweden, 2023. Photo: Erika Svensson







YGGDRASIL

In Norse mythology, Ásatrú's creation story is described through Yggdrasil – a very large ash tree – the most perfect, beautiful and largest of them all, *verdenstreet* – the World Tree.

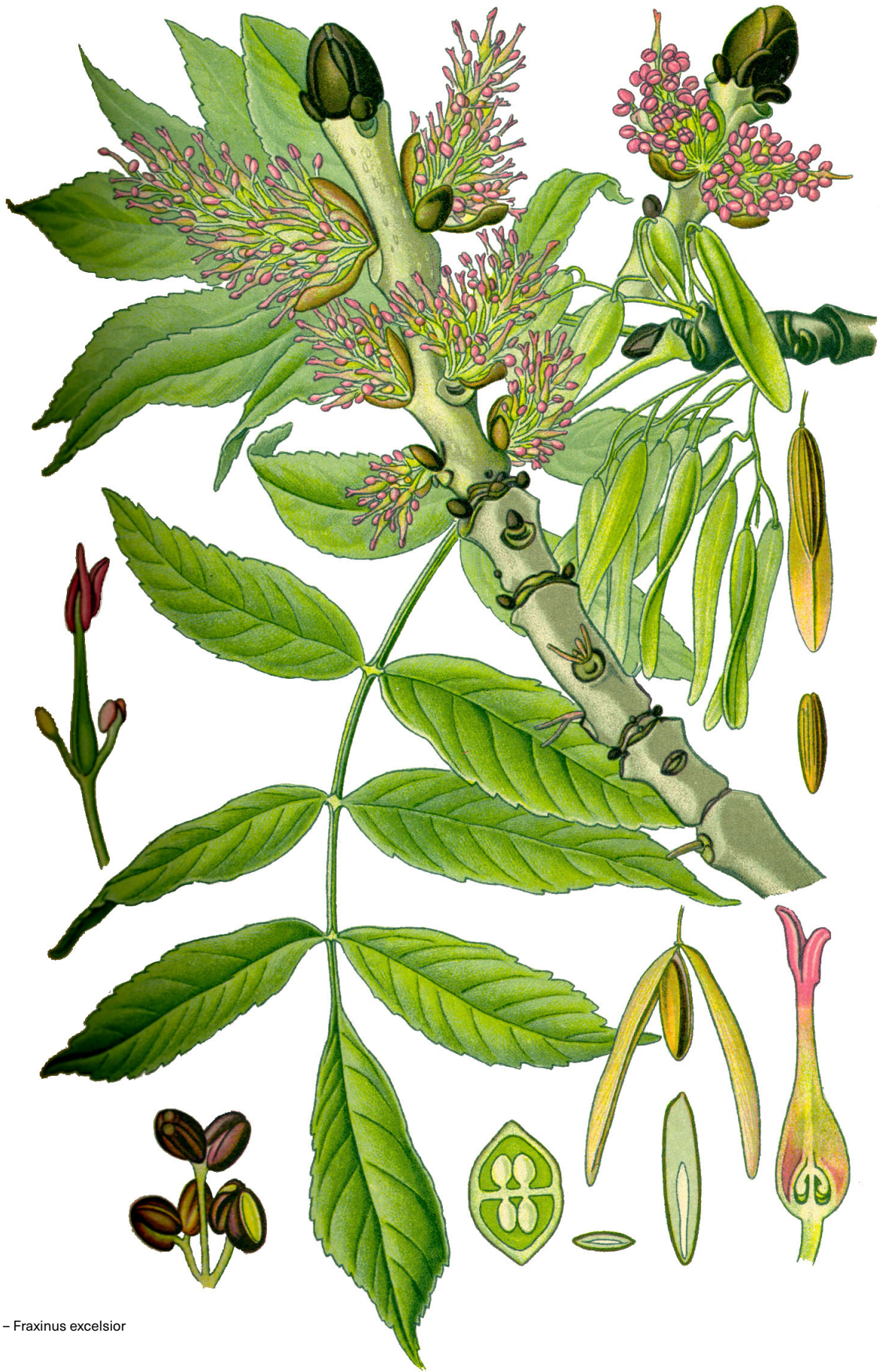
According to legends, Yggdrasil has been green since time immemorial and grows from three roots that each reach a well. Four stags graze on Yggdrasil's crown and next to them a goat. From the goat's udder flows the clear mead, which the gods feed on. In Norse cosmogony, Odin created the first humans. On the shore of the sea he found two tree trunks: an ash and an elm, Odin gave life to them – the ash became the first man Ash and the elm became the first woman Embla.

Today, the ash trees are diseased and at risk of extinction.¹ Ash dieback disease is a sickness caused by the invasive fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*. Currently, there is no known cure for ash dieback, but researchers at the Swedish University of Agriculture believe that the possibility of preserving the ash lies in clone banks and resistant individual specimens. Their research has shown that some ash trees carry a genetic resistance to the disease. As in the mythology, ashes are a source of life. Today, over 480 animal species live on ash trees, of which over 220 are red-listed species linked to the tree genus. Of these, over 40 per cent are completely dependent on the ash.

The artwork proposed consists of a planted ash tree paired with sculptural bronze parts highlighting the sickness of the species placed in the inner courtyard. The planting of the tree could be coupled with a collaboration with a research initiative in Sweden or Norway, using the work as a bridge to connect the saga of Yggdrasil with a story of contemporary research and ecological knowledge. The idea is that the tree in the museum becomes a sort of ambassador for ash research, contributing to spreading knowledge about ash dieback and engaging the public in saving the tree. In a broader sense it addresses questions about the ecosystem and the significance of each species within networks of history, culture and nature.

As described earlier in the text, this third component is optional and dependent upon external developments of the inner courtyard.

1 European-wide forest monitoring substantiates the necessity for a joint conservation strategy to rescue European ash species (*Fraxinus* spp.) www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-08825-6



Ash - *Fraxinus excelsior*



Diseased core



Mushrooms



BAATERS Patent Oil Printing 11, Northampton Square.

YGGDRASILL,
The Mundane Tree.

see p. 492.

Yggdrasil



Architectural illustrations of the inner courtyard from the architectural pre-project



Architectural illustrations of the inner courtyard from the architectural pre-project

Germain Ngoma

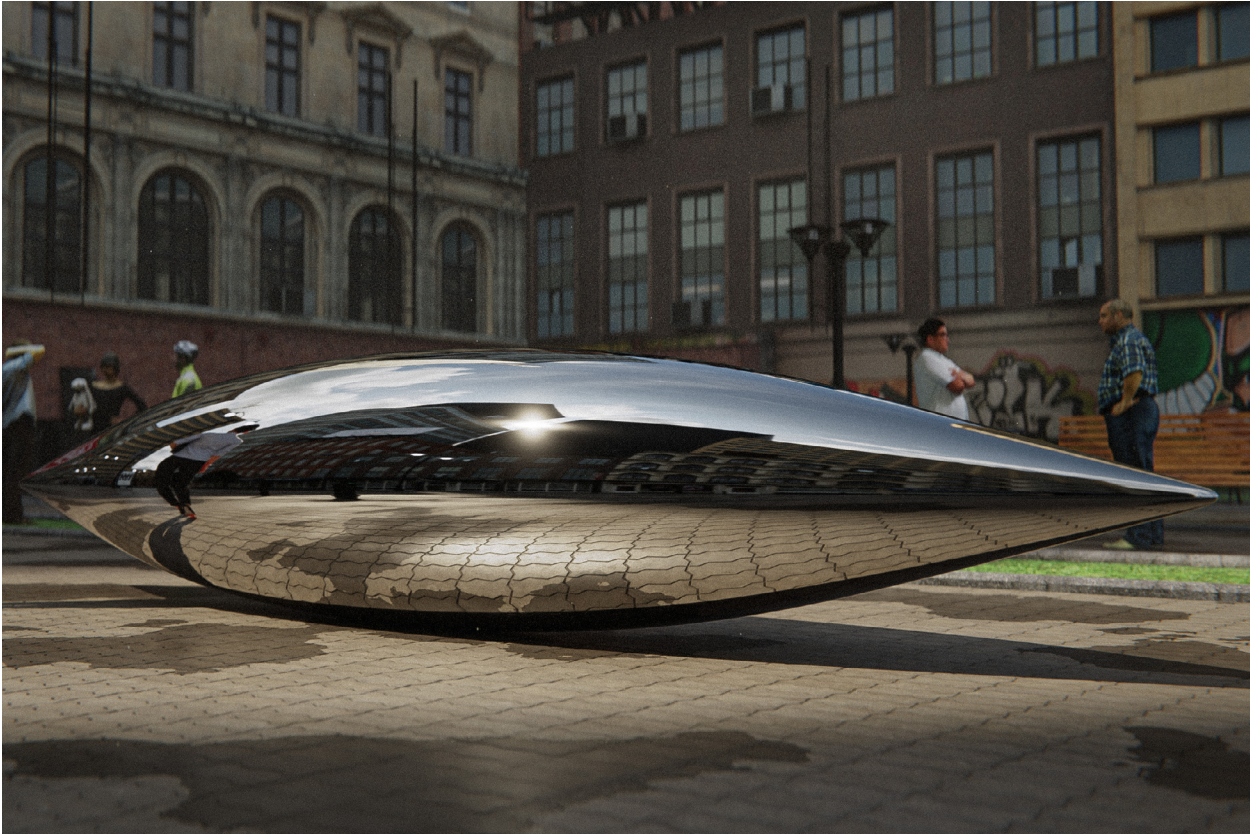
The Capsule

Proposal

The Ship / Chooser of the Slain

I changed name once. When you travel out on the sea you can do that. No one cares. And no one expects you back. It's like a rocket being shot out in space, no one knows when you are going to return. Goodbye. Go to a stranger land. Forget your name. But not where you are coming from. People may ask and it says a lot about you. Where you come from, and what your parents do. What do they work with. People will ask you this and then they will understand something about you. If you don't want people to know who you are, then you should not answer these questions. You will get your freedom, but you will be very lonely. You will be very lonely if no one knows your name. The ship might carry you just halfway, and you will have to find a place to stay right there. With those people that are there. It might not be ideal, but you cannot return. No one remembers you at home, they have all but forgotten. And they did not expect you. A ship can carry many people, so be prepared to start all over, and be prepared to find new places to call home. I did this, and it was easy for me, but then it became hard. I met people I wanted to connect with, and I wanted to stay, but in the end I thought it was not for me. I had forgotten the password. And in the end there was no I any more. The ship and I were the same. The ship was made of steel and it had the speed of a bullet. The world was not even the same any more, it was different times, and I recognised no one. I was very free. I had seen the biggest waves, and other creatures, things that no one else had seen, things there were no words for. I dreamt over and over that I could stop by, I dreamt over and over that I wanted to meet someone. Someone who would know the rest of the way. But I didn't want to meet anyone any more and I had forgotten the password. When the tree is shaking she will come. Then I have to tell her the password. There will be gates opening and the tree will shiver on high. And the password is my own name. I just have to tell her my real name.

– *Jim Særnblom*



The Capsule, illustration

THE CAPSULE

Upon my engagement with the Viking ship proposal, I was immediately aware of the influence Viking history would exert on this project. It became the source of reference material and information. Anchoring the project's conceptual foundation.

In the initial stages of conceptualisation, I entertained the idea of diverting from a singular monumental sculpture in favour of creating an assemblage of smaller sculptures. These pieces would draw upon the rich tapestry of Viking artefacts and historical narratives.

However the challenge of cohesively presenting these individual art works within an external exhibition space became apparent. It was within this context that I conceived *The Capsule* concept of a singular coherent object. This allowed for a minimalist potent expression.

The streamlined shape is supposed to suggest a floating object, but it can also be seen as just an abstract form. The shape in itself radiates some kind of speed and aggression which I associate with the Vikings.

The sculpture will be cast in stainless steel with a mirror-finish surface, and has a kind of futuristic aesthetics that reflects on time and technology.

I want the capsule to suggest time travel, like a capsule sailing across time and space. Its form reflects the surroundings in real time and takes us back to the Vikings, but at the same time to the future. It can lay on the grass, it can be inside, but it could also be placed in a more urban context.

PRODUCTION

The sculpture is going to be cast in stainless steel, and just needs washing for maintenance.



The Capsule, illustration

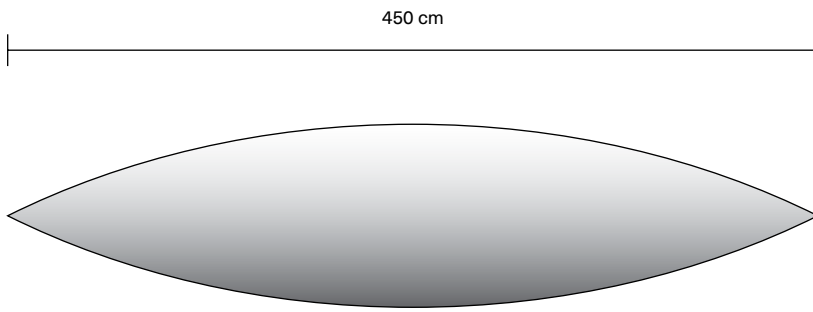




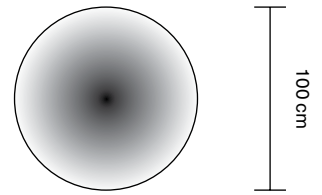
The Capsule, illustration



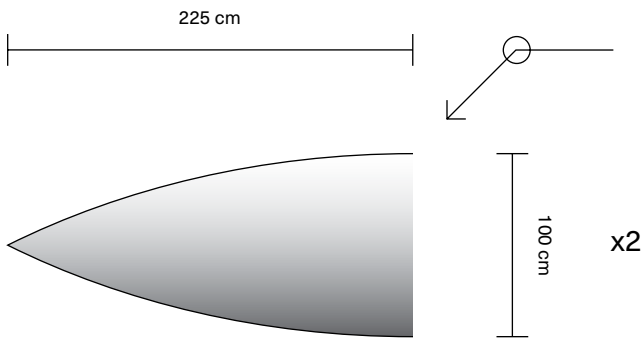
THE CAPSULE / SCULPTURE



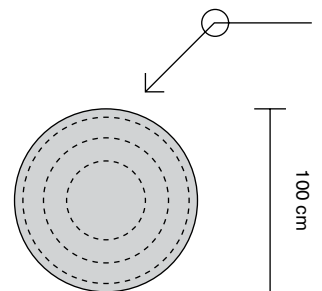
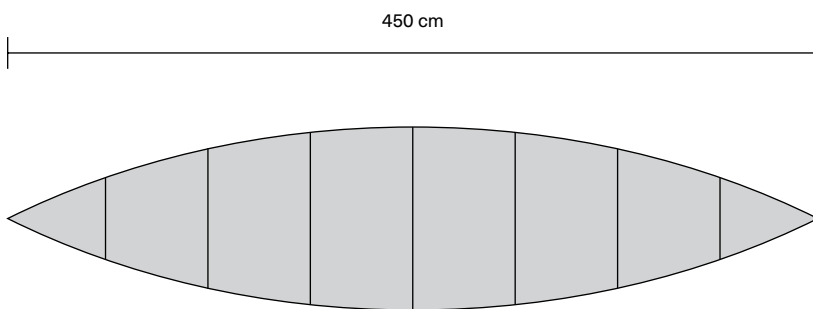
DIAMETER



HALF SCULPTURE



CONSTRUCTION



The Capsule, specifications

Jim Særnblom
Seiðr/The Waves

Proposal

If the Light Takes Us

I just spent a lot of money and now I'm tired. Now there are just holes in my pocket. I'm dizzy now, as birds flying into windows.

When opening up the books they are all empty, every page, and we are empty too. We had to empty our souls. Just like the sky is empty of clouds.

We let the waves carry us somewhere. We let the stones guide us. Where the light takes us, that is where we will go. The black crystal will show us, and we are able to find the light even if it's cloudy. When the sun is gone for days, it doesn't bother us. We don't care. There is still hope, still guidance.

Never shall we sail past the same mountains, never will we see the same islands with the same trees on top. When the map is empty, we are okay with that.

– *Jim Særnblom*



Waves, collage



Waves, woodcut

There is this image of Norway as a land of woods and trolls and mountains, but, in reality, Norway is just stone. With some trees on top. Up in the north of Norway, the mountains are some of the oldest in the world. Moving south the stone gets younger, torn, eroded. The coast of Norway is so long that the waves and the sea have washed and formed most of it, and the rest of the land is ground down and shaped by ice. Time changes everything, and it becomes very visible in stone that has been washed down by water. This is of course a very banal image. It's a metaphor we are all tired of. It's as though our heads get washed and ground down as we speak about it, that is how tired we are of this image. At the same time, to walk by the beach and look at stones, all different sizes, or just watch how the waves roll over them, still gives a certain sense of peace. We feel small, as we should, perceiving how long it takes for stone to be shaped by water. At the same time, eternity and the moment exist as one, as our hyperactive subjective self is placed in the background or somewhere else. We don't even have to keep our eyes open; the sound of the sea is all that exists.

The Vikings controlled and navigated the sea better than we do, with the means they had at the time. The three ships that the museum has are the most important part of its collection, and the most well preserved ships remaining from this time in history. We know it was a disaster for people at the time to see ships like these appear on the horizon – the Vikings ravaged the shores of Europe so violently that the Catholics said a special prayer, *A furore Normannorum libera nos* (Save us from the wrath of the Norwegians). The Vikings did not travel the sea to conquer land for their kings, as Cortéz and Pizarro did. The pirate raids were individual missions, if one can call them that. That probably made it worse, as people knew exactly why they would come. And yes, today the symbolism of the ships themselves can easily be connected to conquest and violence. But it depends on the eye that sees. Some see an excellent and mindblowing use of oak to create arrow-like projectiles, sailing fast and far. The ships are all of this at once.

As the ships will be located within the new museum, I want to make an outside link to them. The wave they ride upon. The sea.

As a queer person, I always look for signs to see and feel representation. In the *Saga of King Olav Tryggvason (Heimskringla)*, a key text in the study of Viking Age history, there is a chapter where the king visits an island, and on the way they meet another ship 'full of Seidmen and that sorts', and he throws them in the sea to drown. The word *Seid* means witchcraft or magic and was used for women only. Men who used *Seid* were accused of being feminine, womanlike (*Ergi*, meaning unmanly, was the worst name a man could be called!). However, in myths both Loke and Odin were said to use *Seid* and had this duality. They were mocked for it, but mostly excused – it was understood that the gods needed both male and female powers. Loke appeared as man and woman, and the fact that Odin, the greatest of all war gods, held this duality shows the complexity and strength of the phenomenon.

To me it seems the word *Seid* was also used as derogatory and insulting slang that no man wanted to be accused of. A stone has been found inscribed with runes warning people from vandalising it: 'Seidmann is he who messes with these runes.' Homophobia has existed forever, but that is not my focus for it is the duality of feminine and masculine that was very threatening to the Vikings. It represented an uncontrolled power that was both scary and necessary. And divine. That is, when the gods used this power it was as a tool, and even fun and entertaining, as in the stories of Loke (*Lokasenna Kvadsteksten*). But the Seidmen that were thrown in the sea to die were threatening. Strange.

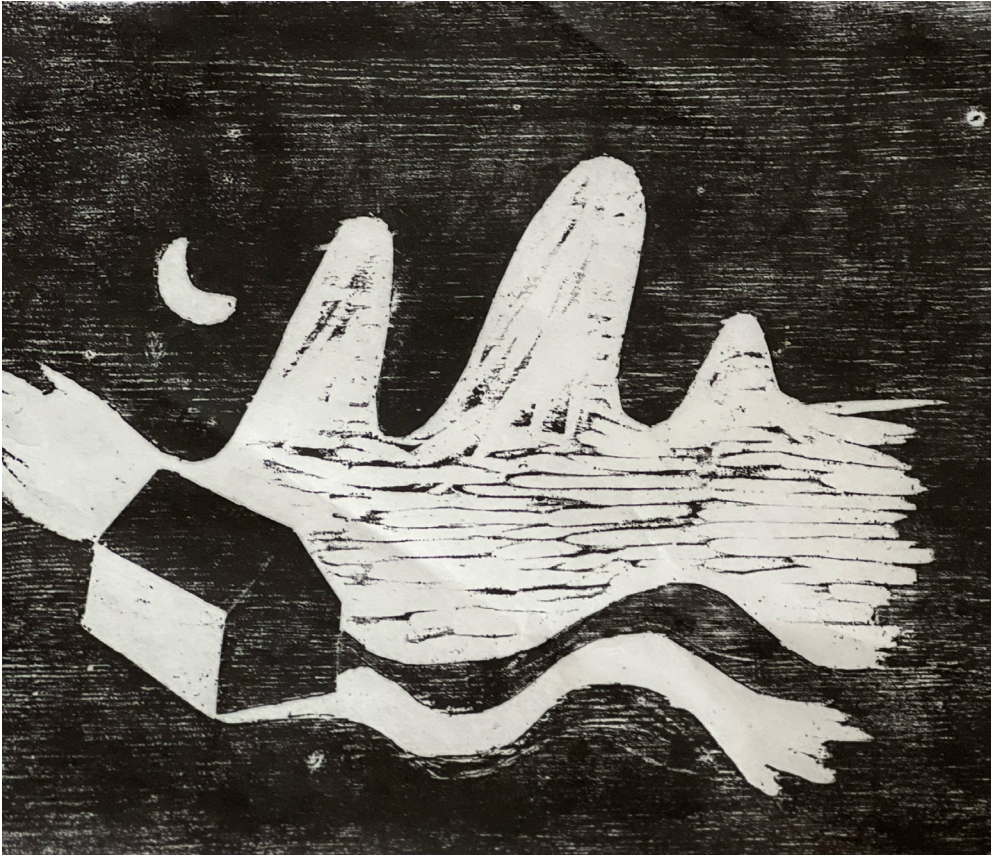
Halfdan Egedius (who died at only 21 years old) made the illustrations in *Snorre Sturlasons Sagas*, and his drawings of the Seidmenn thrown in the sea are so different than all the other illustrations in the book, made by Werenskiold, Munthe and Krogh. As an artist, Egedius is mystic, queer, symbolic and strange, and he was definitely an outsider.

Seiðr / The Wave will be a large sculpture made of stone, the type of which I'm still researching. Preliminary discussions point to larvikitt blue as a good candidate. It has a touch of green to it. I have also considered a darker stone, towards black, as a natural link to Norwegian black metal and pre-Christian culture. Further consideration and research will be made on stone types, colour and sourcing. The placement of the sculpture will also have a lot of impact on which stone to use. Placed in the woods the sculpture becomes more of a mythical object, as opposed to near the entrance, where it could be more of a gathering point and landmark. If placed near the entrance, it would interact more with the other materials, such as the paving stones in front of the museum, the materials used within the museum itself (both old and new) and for the benches and fences near the entrance.

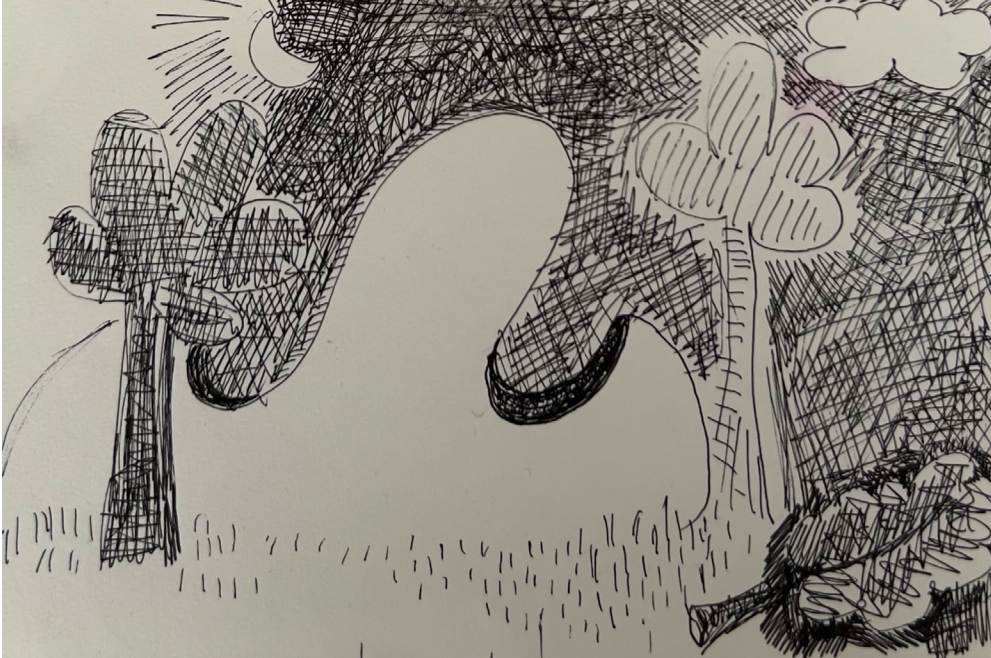
I want the sculpture to be leaned on, rested against or sat on. The first part of the sculpture is more pleasant as the wave moves away from the user, whereas the last part is more threatening, as the wave is peering from above. An important aspect of the sculpture is to make a wave threatening and fun at the same time. The paradox of capturing a wave in stone. Contrast between hard stone and soft shape. The absurdity and humour of making two waves that move toward each other, whilst the middle wave makes a completely different shape. To make a complex form is to make the viewer believe and accept what they see, even if it's 'wrong'.



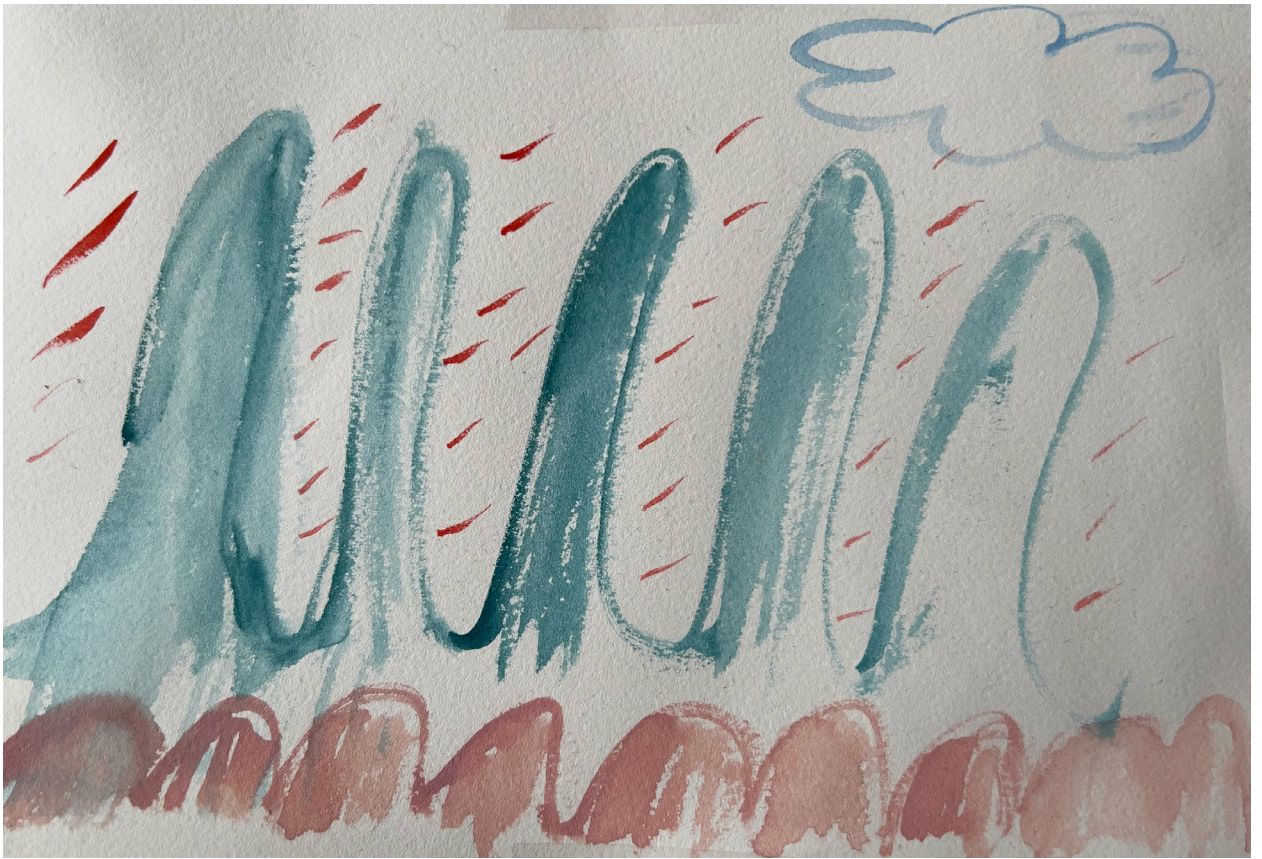
Top: Halfdan Egedius, *Seidmennene på Skrattekjær*, 1897–1899, pen on paper
Bottom: *Seidmennene på Skrattekjær*, sketch



Night in Skrova, 2023
Woodcut on Chinese paper



Sculpture and trees, 2023
Pen on paper



Waves, 2023
Watercolour on paper



Prototype in clay

LOCATION

Preferably outdoors in the natural area surrounding the new part of the museum. A bit hidden and surrounded by trees it will function as a place to rest, both for kids overloaded with impressions from the collection and for adults in need of digesting and contemplating the visit or just simply to chill. There is no doubt that the museum will be extremely busy at most times and it will be crucial for some to have a break in a unique and quiet place away from the crowd. In nature, placed directly on the ground, the sculpture itself will be more of a mystical object and interesting to spend time with. It will also be more separate and independent from the museum.

(See how the sun moves around the museum, which is a link to how the Vikings navigated on the sea. The stone will be warm and cold, and research is required as it will be used for sitting and leaning on, and for climbing.)

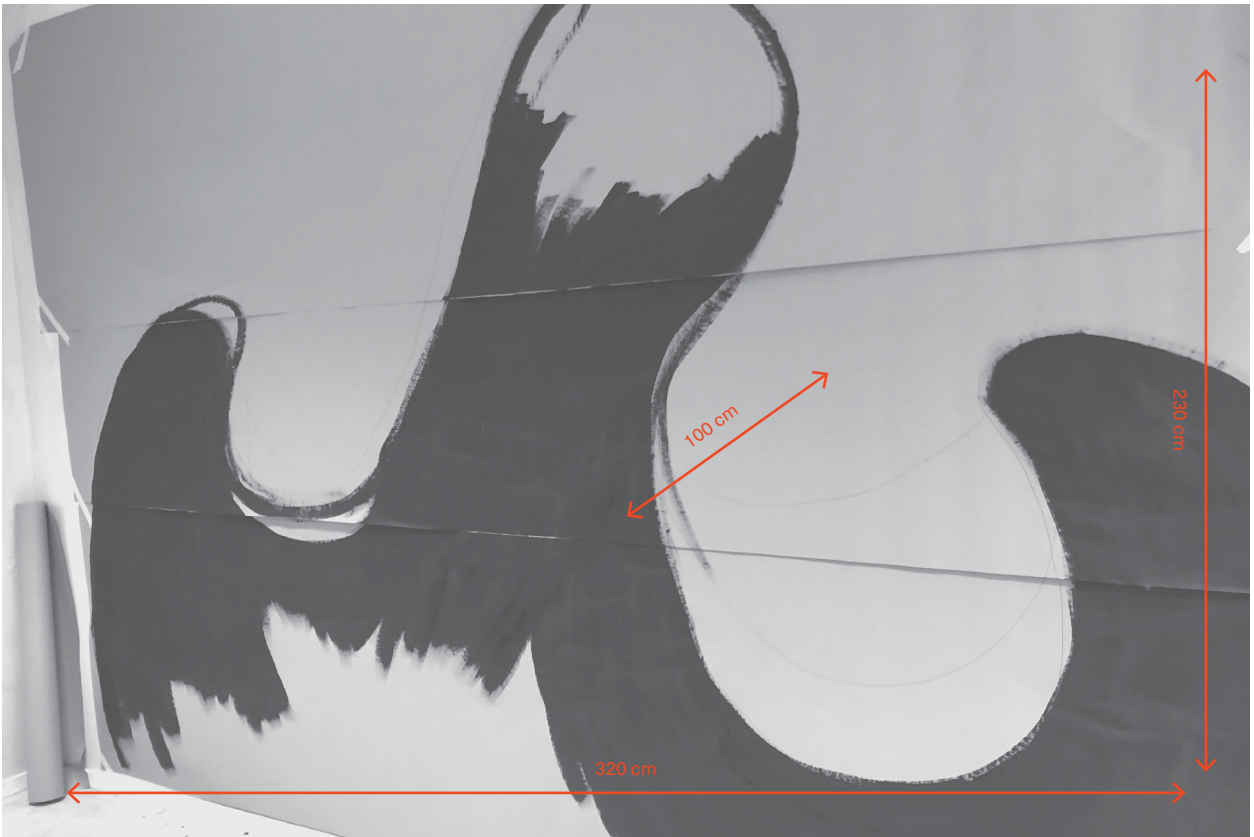
An alternative placement is at the front of the museum and/or connected to the entrance. Located at a much more busy area, the sculpture will be surrounded by people moving in and out of the museum. It could then be seen as a meeting point for school kids; a place to sit or lean against while waiting for someone. Being placed here, it is tempting to use a black or darker-coloured stone, to keep that mysterious feeling of the sculpture. But that could also give a rather significant brutal expression to the sculpture (which can be good). It is a question of whether to make it stand out or integrate it more with the surroundings. They are both interesting options.

MATERIALS

Larvikitt – Pacific blue (need further research on the specifics of carving: methods/texture/patterns, etc.).

DESCRIPTION OF THE SCULPTURE

A block of stone will be carved into a massive, distinct shape of three waves. Between the waves there will be room to sit/lean/rest.



Dimensions and illustration of scale
230 x 100 x 320 cm

Shubhangi Singh
Dead Bird

Proposal

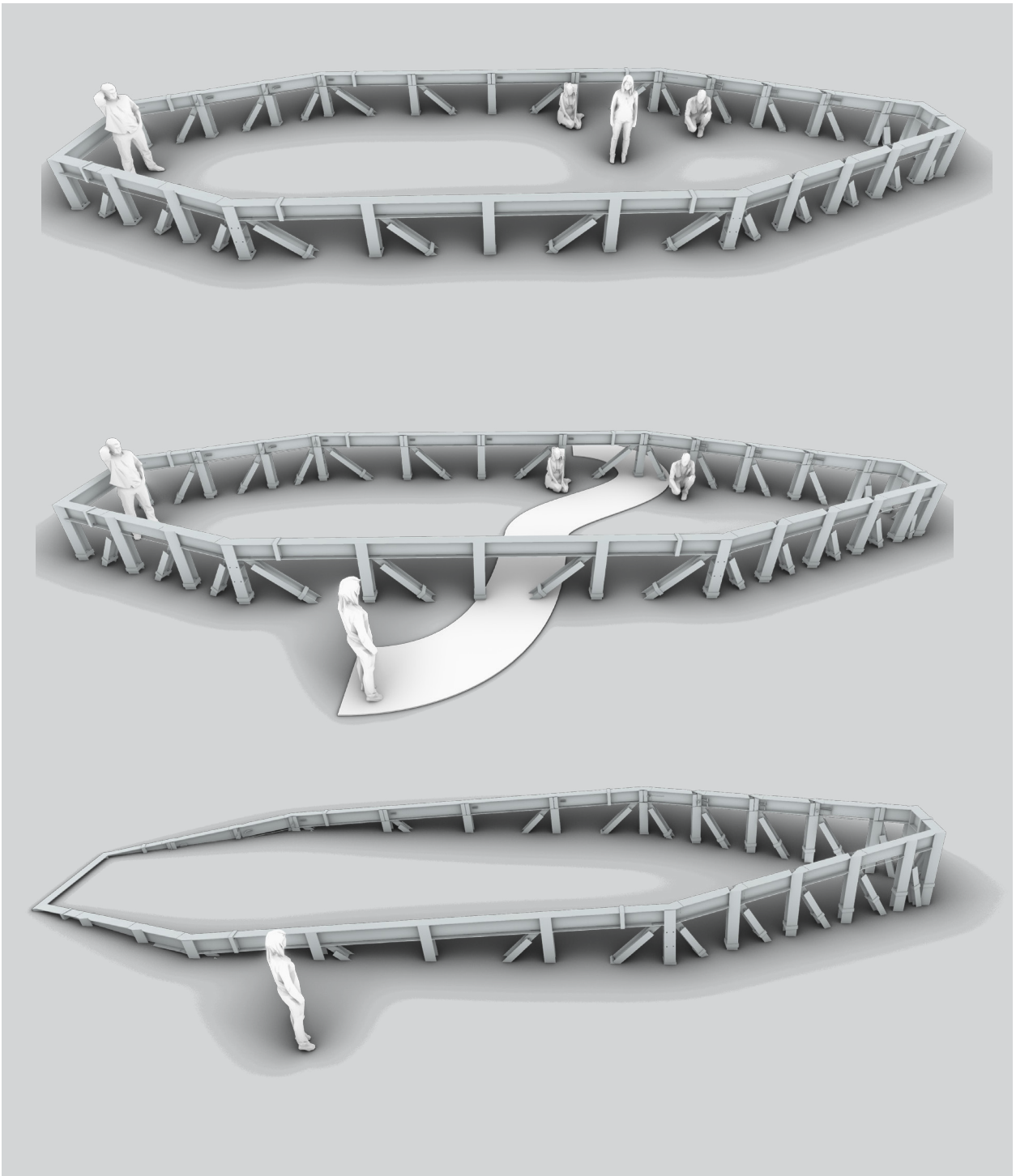
What Was

These fields remind me of some pictures I have seen of fields.

That is why I like them. The hills, I do not find them pleasant. I have never seen them before. I pass by some trees. There are no animals on this path. Only me. It should have been easy to get home but it's not. It is only me, the hills and the trees. If I meet someone else on this path, I will stop and chat. But right now, there is no one.

I am still optimistic, as long as I don't walk in circles I am hopeful. I see things that I rest my eyes on, and I can remember the way. I see things among the trees, I see a black stone. It appears, but walking by, it disappears again. As it should. The landscape is scarred, it is hurt. I have no idea why. I see bricks and white bones. Someone has been here. It gives me a sense of peace. The bricks are too heavy and the bones should just be where they are. Is the soil drenched in blood here? Maybe I misunderstood. Maybe it's all drenched in blood. There are flowers everywhere. There are no seasons for anything here, it all seems to happen at once. The sun and the moon are just chasing after each other.

– *Jim Særnblom*



Prototype, sketches

ABSTRACT

This proposal intends to work with the custom-made steel rig that is currently in use to secure the Tune ship. It aims to adopt the rig and then bury it, either partially or completely, in the park area on the new museum grounds. The following text expands upon the rationale, motivation, questions and reflections guiding the proposed work.

PREFACE

If viewed from an anthropocentric position, objects may only have value because we assign them their value. This value is largely produced in relation to us as consumers or users of that object. It is epistemic and transactional. Any object's value outside of our use is unknown, though not non-existent.

The three ships on display at the Viking museum at Bygdøy transcend their role as objects of historical relevance, becoming iconographic imprints ubiquitous in Norwegian culture, all the way to the 100 krone banknote. This entanglement of the object with the everyday transforms the ship(s) into a spectacular monument of national importance, unwittingly also becoming entangled in the nation's collective construction of identity, belonging and remembrance. Of *value*.

The burial ships, even in all their fragility, loom imposingly over the (public) imagination, their image is loaded with everything that is and isn't the ships' to deliver. Elevated from a position of artefacts, they become totems of heritage, culture and memory; of a romanticised view of the Viking that is mythologised far beyond historical and scientific evidence.

What would then happen if one were to remove the ship from this discourse? Could *absenting* the ship from sight then somehow become a gesture of turning off or dialling down the power it may have over the collective imagination? A way of tracing shifts in memory and memory-making through active removal?

ABSENTING AS METHOD

As opposed to something that could simply or circumstantially be absent, *absenting* is a wilful erasure. The proposed sculptural work considers *absenting* as a deliberate and charged action that carries intention.

The proposed work considers removal as a form of absenting. Removing something creates a void where the void itself can become a site of and for active reflection. And when something monumental is removed, that void carries potential for infinite alternatives to now exist in the vacuum left from the removal. The emptiness is a charged and contested site; and a breeding ground for micro counter narratives to exist.

Think of a tooth that has recently been removed. The tongue will time and again find its way to the void. The unhealed wound remains a memory of what the space around it once held, the form that it had only until very recently enveloped. The new sensation felt by the tongue is a memory of a now phantom organ. The void is what you are left with, the tooth is deep in a box in your closet, discharged from its duty. A tooth removed may be invisible but never non-existent.

PROPOSAL

The proposal seeks to adopt the heavy metal rig, constructed to preserve the ship while the museum is being renovated, into an artwork. It imagines the use of the rig after it has run its course and is relieved from its current duty of protecting the ship. It hopes to adopt the rig after it is taken away from the valuable object, that is, the ship itself and instead turn it into a sculptural work that references the ship, but by actively *absenting* it. Rejecting it.

This rig would be buried on the museum ground, either partially or fully, leaving some metal still in view above the ground. It looks like a beetle on its back with its legs flung skywards or perhaps a porous shell – a space for rest, reflection, rumination and inhabitation.



Example of rig

The walking path could be running through the structure, goading the visitor to move through it. It is not an inaccessible object to be revered but a peoples' structure to be interacted with. To be touched and leaned against. It is sturdy. It is exposed. It is to be deliberated with and against.

The ship's value as the vehicle to deliver whom it was assigned to carry into the after-life was perhaps inestimable to begin with. The passage of time has only added to the object's worth. By *absenting* the ship, the proposal attempts to bring some degree of irreverence (though not irrelevance) to the artefacts in the adjoining museum complex – *absenting* through inversion of status quo.

As opposed to Oseberg or Gokstad, the Tune ship in particular was (possibly) built to be a fast sea-faring vessel not made to last. But here they are, way past their bedtime. In offsetting the fantasy, the lore as well as the heavy iconography attached to this mega-object, the rejection of the ship not only discharges its power, but the absence itself produces an empty space that is unquantifiable. Once the museum is complete, the rig that was constructed solely to preserve the object will be 'nullified' and made 'useless' in its current form. The loss of purpose is a tangible negative space that opens up the potential for new values to be assigned to them, thus becoming a nesting doll of empty spaces and of undetermined value.

Can the ship-shaped hole ever be anything that isn't a ship? That isn't the ship?

Can the work ever disassociate from the object that it once served?

Can the form ever break from its original purpose? What about breaking from its original form?

Could the fact that we are aware of its original purpose mean that

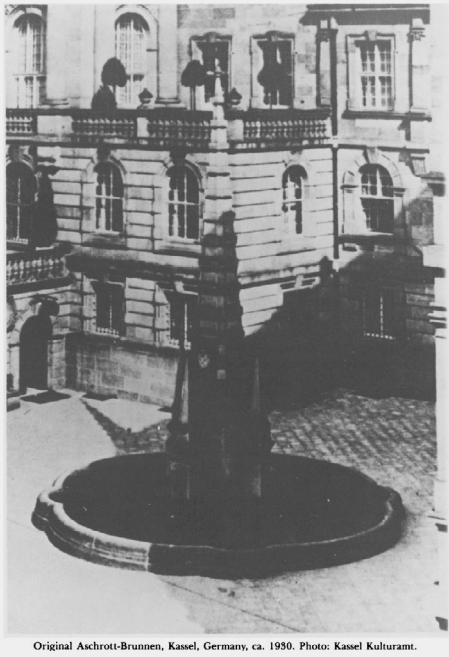
we can never rid it of that history or would it be possible for the structure to reject the identity and transform something else entirely unrelated? If yes, then could this be possible for other forms of identity?

COUNTER-MEMORY

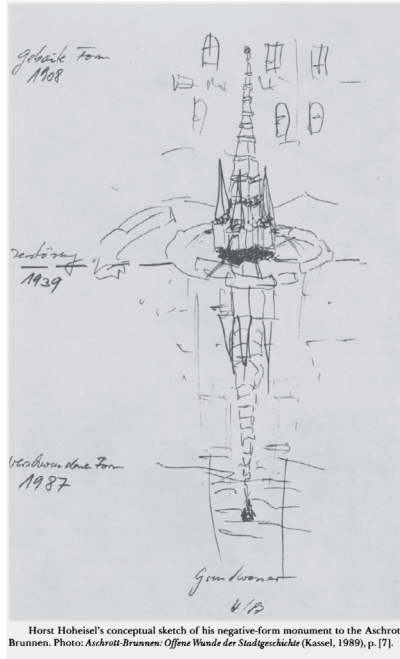
The metal rig and the emptiness that it carries within it can never be fully unoccupied. The work hopes to shake loose the stronghold that historical artefacts may have in shaping (and imposing) socio-cultural identities. Perhaps, even in the favour of the artefacts themselves. Memory is met with counter-memory. Force with vacuum.

The proposal can be viewed within the legacy of counter-monuments (as discussed by James E. Young), such as those of Sol LeWitt's *Black Form* or Horst Hoheisel's *Aschrott Fountain*, to name a few. Memorials raise complex questions about which history we choose to remember. If a memorial cannot tell the whole story, then what part of the story, or whose story, does it tell? In relation, counter-monuments can be understood as contemporary commemorative forms and practices, largely produced for memorialising the 'other' often marginalised narratives in order to diffuse or challenge the dominance of singular narratives. The counter-monuments are brought into the public domain either in defiance of the existing monuments (and what they represent) or to counter the dominant narratives – often addressing emptiness, systemic erasure, inversions or a denial of visibility – *unabsenting*.

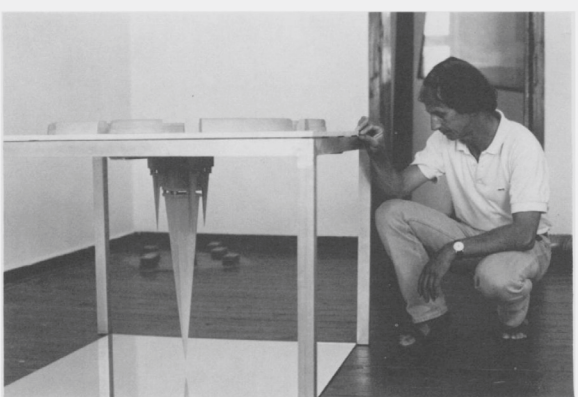
Counter-monuments challenge aspects of traditional memorialising culture (in form, subject, meaning, reception) that affirm or celebrate dominant histories. In doing so however, the counter-monuments admittedly themselves become in danger of reproducing those same existing patterns, those similar anxieties and narratives, now just replacing the old with the new.



Original Aschrott-Brunnen, Kassel, Germany, ca. 1930. Photo: Kassel Kulturamt.



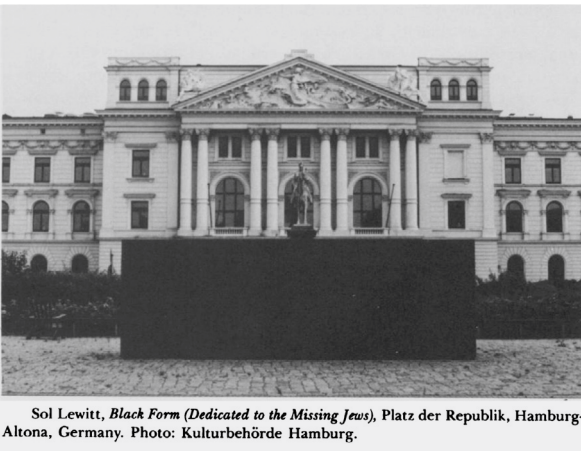
Horst Hoheisel's conceptual sketch of his negative-form monument to the Aschrott-Brunnen. Photo: *Aschrott-Brunnen: Offene Wände der Stadtgeschichte* (Kassel, 1989), p. 71.



Horst Hoheisel with his model of the negative-form monument to the Aschrott-Brunnen. Photo: James E. Young.



Peering down into the negative-form monument to the Aschrott-Brunnen, Kassel. Photo: Horst Hoheisel.



Sol Lewitt, *Black Form (Dedicated to the Missing Jews)*, Platz der Republik, Hamburg-Altona, Germany. Photo: Kulturbehörde Hamburg.

Illustrations from James E. Young's 'The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry* [Italics] (vol. 18, no. 2), University of Chicago Press, 1992.

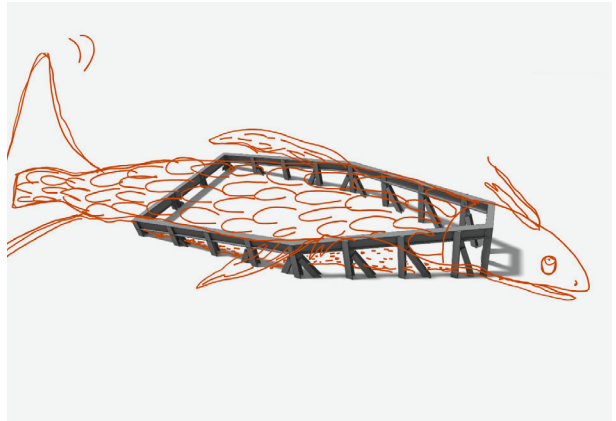
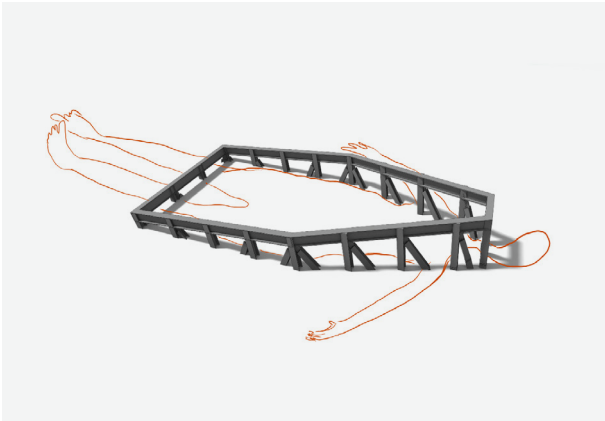
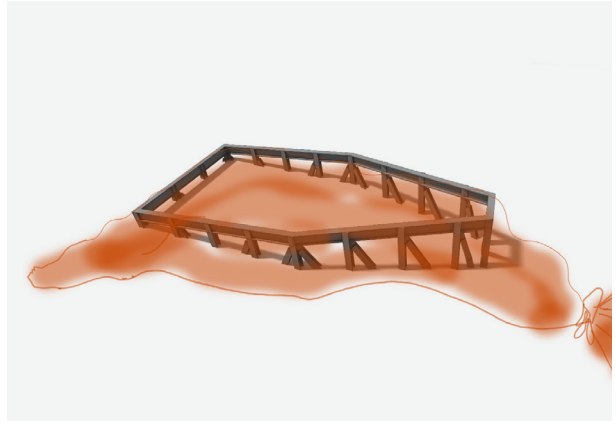
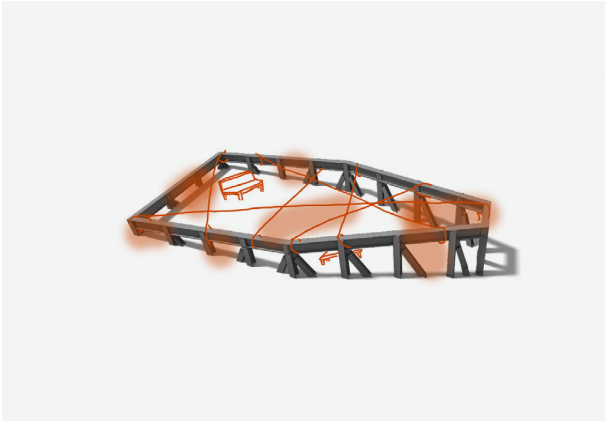
My proposal for the new Museum of the Viking Age understands the temptation of materiality as a portal between history and the future. The proposal does not wish to extricate a historical object from its place of cultural relevance but instead it hopes to offset the reverence that influences science, culture, nation-building, and ideological and hegemonic dominance. The proposal isn't opposed to artefacts and it understands the arguments put forth by material culture. It however rejects the cult of nationhood that the objects get absorbed into.

PRODUCTION AND MATERIAL

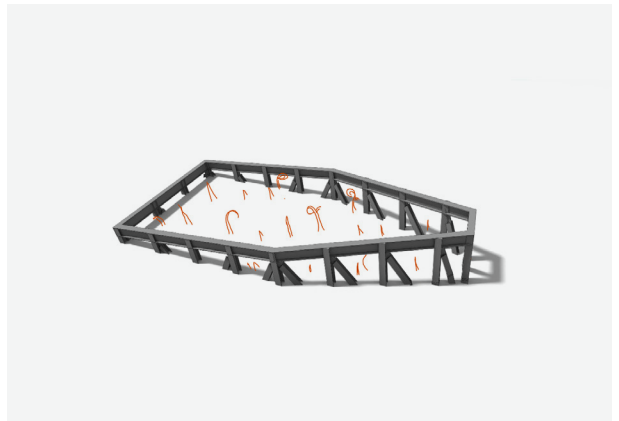
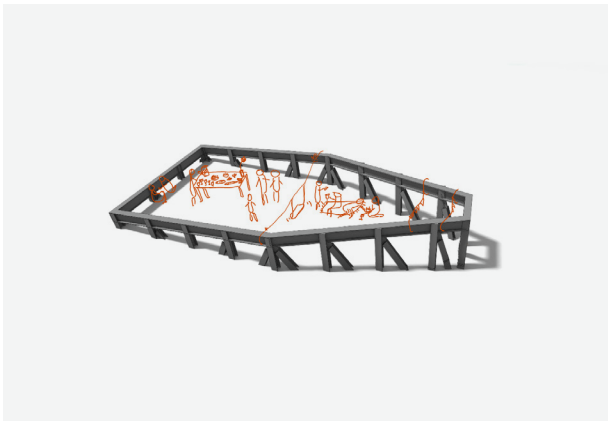
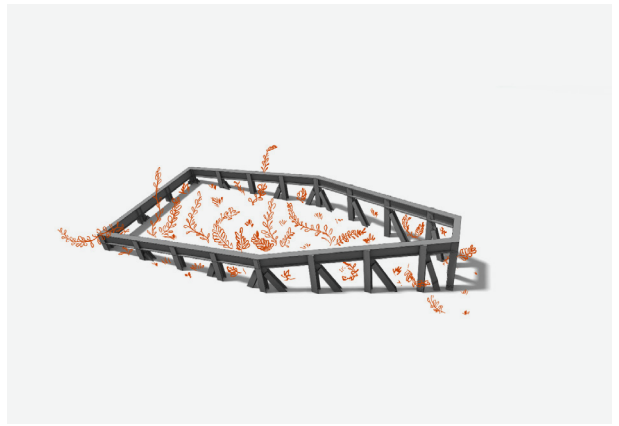
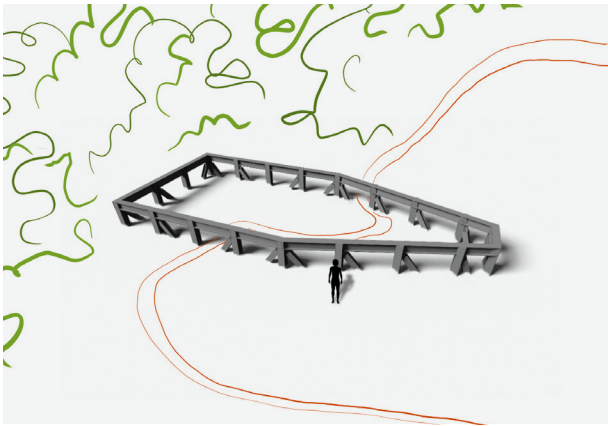
The artwork is constructed using existing materials, primarily the metal rig currently in use by Statsbygg and the MVA project to protect the Tune ship through the building reconstructions. The scaffolding pieces would be acquired for this work. When the rig is dismantled from its current station, it would be reassembled on to the new site on the museum grounds. This would be then buried half-way (or wholly) in the ground at its present form and scale which stands at roughly 14.5 metres long and 2 metres high.

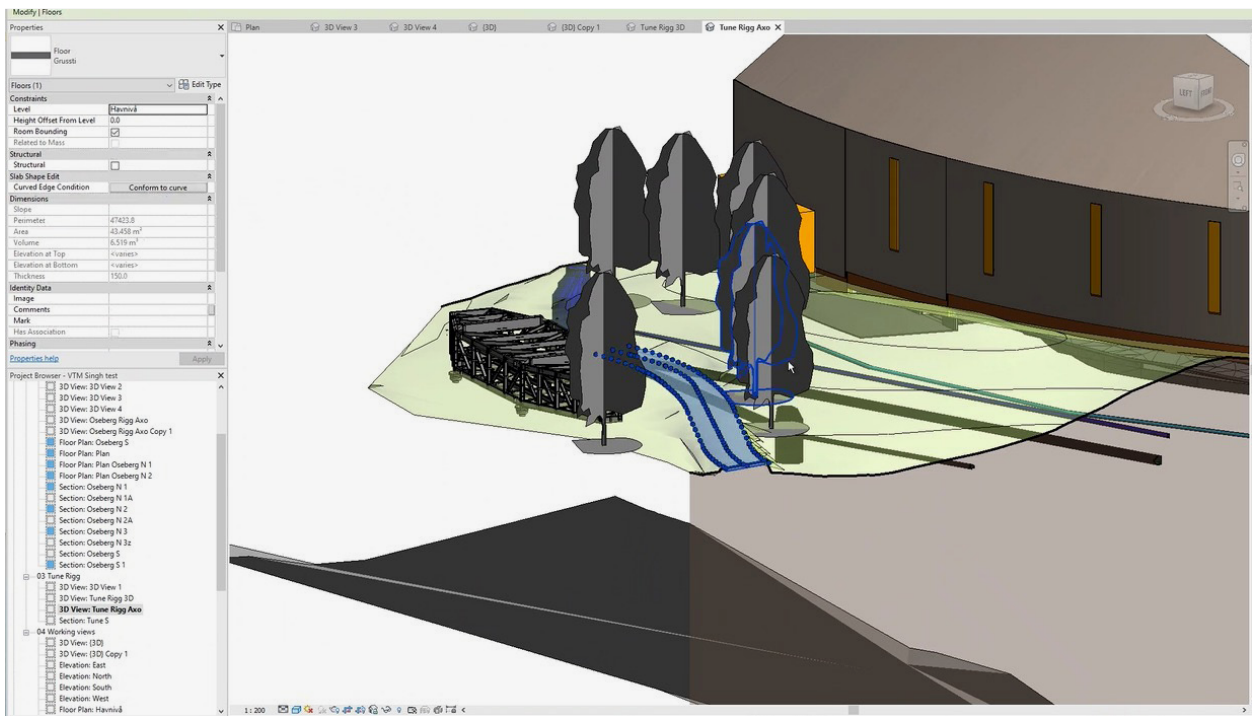
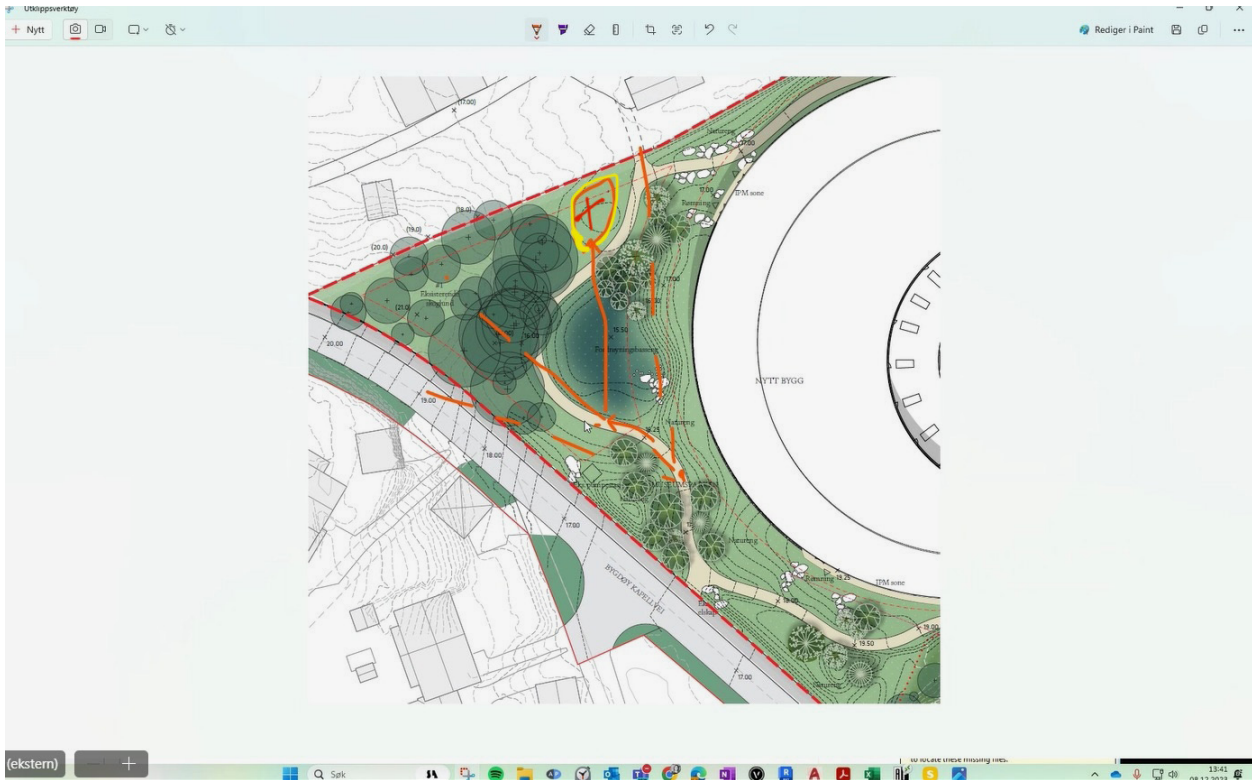
The metal will not be treated too much against corrosion, except for parts that would hold some new text inscriptions. The texts are prompts referring to an artefact's value and their entanglement with the environment that they inhabit.

The work hopes to offer an alternative to the existing and singular reading of histories. The vacuum here is far from simply an absence. It invites one to the forest but does not plainly point to where the berries could be found but instead shows that to get to the berries, one would have to walk through the moss and the fallen trees. Past the bog. And perhaps even an occasional dead bird.



Examples of some very plausible scenarios





Location at the Museum of the Viking Age

Sigrid Espelien Soil Histories

Proposal

Ghosts

I went out to the Viking graves in Borre to do research. They haven't dug out all of the graves yet, no one really knows what's under the ground there. It was evening, late summer so the air was standing still. A friend of mine was coming along, and she actually had a panic attack when we went out there, she said she smelled death. It was probably just garbage, the museum was closed and the bins were overloaded. But it did have a vibe of death, even if everything was green and the graves were very cute. It was as if they were just lying there sleeping. I was looking through the leaves of oak trees, the water was glittering, it's just by the ocean and the boats used to lie there, according to the public map installed on the site. There used to be loads of boats there. There was a guy, it was a bit disturbing, all dressed in black, black long hair in the breeze going up and down the graves on an electric unicycle. A flying ghost. A metal heathen on his iron horse, I thought to myself. We all had our reasons to be out here. A bit further a neo-Nazi took selfies on top of a grave. His style was perfect, skinhead, boots, braces, no shirt on. My friend told me not to stare at him, but I wanted to. He did not give off a very friendly energy. The flying ghost was not aggressive at all, I don't even know what more to say about him. I hoped he would go away. If this sounds too much, it is not. When you think you've found history you haven't. It's not there, because other people took it. Its holes, made by thieves, grave robbers and looters.

– *Jim Særnblom*



First trip to the Viking Age Museum construction site, 11 March 2022

What stories can be read in the mud, the soil, the stones and the clay from the Viking Age Museum site at Bygdøy? In what ways can the underground layers propose a way of seeing, smelling, touching and sensing the past?

Underground layers of clay in the region have played a significant role in the preservation of the ships and objects on display in the museum. The 'blue clay' found in Norway is a marine clay that sedimented when the ice from the last Ice Age, some 10,000–15,000 years ago, started to melt. It is a fine-grained mud with low permeability that gives very limited interaction with groundwater and oxygen and is therefore able to preserve wooden and other organic materials for long spans of time without rot or decay.

There have been archaeological findings of ceramic production in Norway up until the year 500 CE, but after that all ceramics that are found are imported. Historical records point to very little ceramic practice in the Viking Age. Clay was used in this period primarily in its raw state, for making walls in houses or moulds for casting metal. But, while there was not much cultural practice in terms of ceramic vessels or bricks, clay was still very present in Viking culture, as we see in the integral role it played in the burial of the Viking ship graves. Without this very dense material, the ships would not be with us today.

Today the objects are of course removed from their found context – the mud, the soil, the clay – and complex landscapes. In the museum we can see them up close and read about their context and the interpretations of their symbolic adornment through text and other storytelling techniques.

My proposal, *Soil Histories*, seeks to engage the land on which the museum is built, to experience the ground on its own terms to create a different way of experiencing history via an encounter with underground layers. The proposal can be broken into three parts: *The Underground*, *Extraction* and *Transformations*.

THE UNDERGROUND

My core proposal is to 'excavate' a hole in the park area of the museum. The idea is to create a space where people can experience the ground from within by going into and through it. The precise placement of the excavation will be determined, among other things, based on where there is sufficient blue clay, where there is a reasonable distance between the surface and the bedrock, and preferably where the soil has not been moved around a lot previously, for example as a result of the current construction project.

I am interested in revealing layers in the ground and speculating around what they can suggest to us about the Viking Age, about geology or about how we can experience and connect to the land through our bodies. Once exposed, the excavated space will transform over time, as the soil, clay and stones are exposed to oxygen, the weather and shifting temperatures. I will work with this transformation in a way that can situate the artwork within histories of Process art and Land art.

Interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly with the landscape architects responsible for conceptualising the park area, is important for determining the best location for the project. Precise plans regarding how it will be made and experienced are based on ongoing dialogue. But *The Underground* should be a quiet place with a special atmosphere, where the visitor can get away from the crowd and relax in a unique surrounding that suggests being inside or underneath the ground.

EXTRACTION

The second part of the work is *Extraction*, and it takes its starting point in the soil, clay and stones that are dug out from *The Underground*. The title, which means 'removing or taking out', usually used in the mining industry, raises questions about material and economic value, ownership and labour. All clay you can buy in Norway is imported from

TRANSFORMATIONS

other countries and there is no industry except the Leca industry, which uses the blue clay in their products.

Ideally, I would like to display this material in proximity to *The Underground* for an initial period of time. This could be in a simple roofed structure and feature a temporary display after the opening of the museum. The clay, stones and soil can then be used in collaboration with the museum for workshops and further artistic investigation inspired by geological, archaeological and ceramic methods. A programme therefore can come with this artwork, where I hold workshops/events a certain number of times in this period after the opening. Following the display, the material from the hole will be removed. Examples include:

- a) Architecture students researching Viking building techniques or exploring making adobe-style clay houses
- b) A group of museum staff and students that would like to make moulds out of clay for pouring metal into to learn more about this Viking Age technique
- c) Ceramic art students exploring the clay, the site and the objects in the museum for a school project
- d) Immigrants to Norway, learning the language through working with the clay and the stories in the museum

This leads to the third part of the project, titled *Transformations*, which is about using the materials from the excavated site to create new objects. The workshops/events would be part of this, where schools, university students or other groups can transform the materials in collaboration with me and the museum for learning purposes. Such workshops/events have been a regular part of my process over the past ten years.

Another example could be to transform some of the clay from the hole to make crockery for the museum cafe. This is further described in our group collaborative project *THE BODY FEEDS* (see appendix 1).

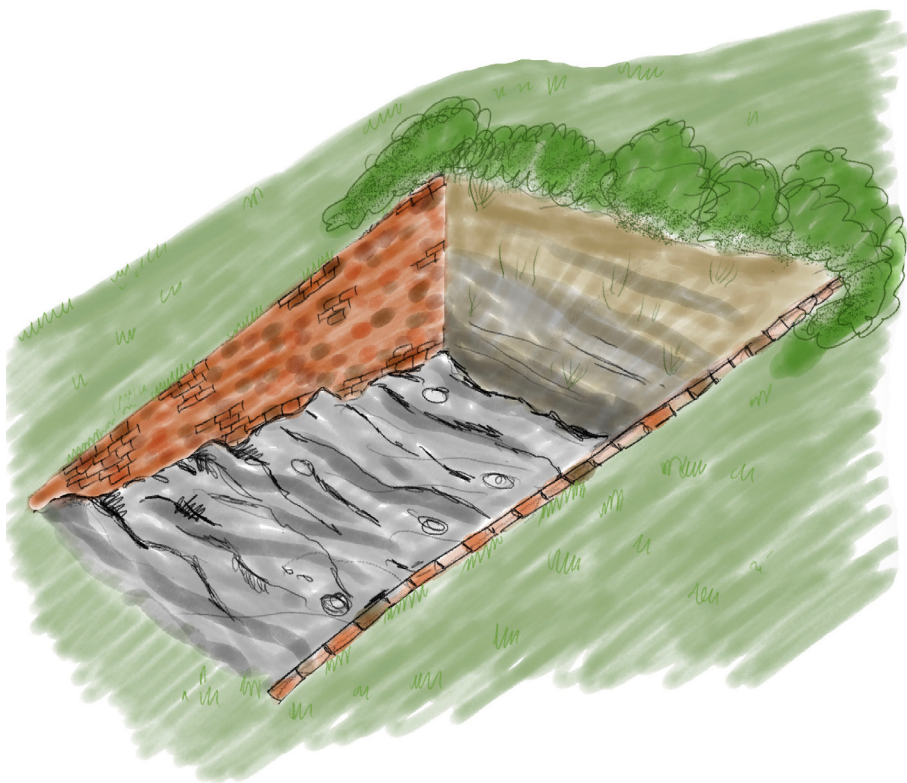
I have also been thinking about making bricks for the floor, walls or seating in *The Underground*. This will depend on the texture of the bedrock where the artwork will be located. I have been informed that the bedrock is a quite interesting Ordovician shale and nodular limestone.¹ If the bedrock can be used as 'floor' and 'seating' it would be an ideal vehicle through which to tell underground stories.

I see the ceramic bricks, vessels and crockery as fossilised documents of the ground. These objects will be yet another way of experiencing the ground and Norwegian history through materiality that can be touched and used. The objects will be ready for the opening of the museum while the workshops would be held after the opening in collaboration with the museum.

1 J. Naterstad, J.F. Bockelie, T. Bockelie, O. Graverson, H. Hjelmeland, B.T. Larsen, O. Nilsen, 'Asker, 1814 I. Berggrunnskart / 1:50 000' (From a geological bedrock map over Bygdøy), 1990



The Underground, west of the Osebergfløy



The Underground, detail



Marine clay extracted from construction projects in Oslo, 2020



'Clay in the landscape' workshop, 2022–23.
The clay from *The Underground* could also be used for workshops.

PREVIOUS PROJECTS AS REFERENCES

Overgang (2022) outdoor ceramic relief made with blue clay from Oslo. Produced by me by harvesting material, forming and firing. Installed by Mjøndalen mur&puss. Oslo Commune Art Collection at Dronning Ingrid's hage nursery home for people with dementia.

Bricks – Selvbyggeren (2022–23) bricks made by me and the Selvbyggeren crew with local clay from Økern in three workshops: 'Clay in the landscape', 'Stamps and signs', 'Brick

making and Brick masonry workshop with "blue clay" mortar' with Christopher Millar. Temporary art in public space project initiated by Oslo commune and KORO, Økern, Oslo.

The Medieval Oslo Clay Series (2017) hand-made ceramic bowls and cups made from clay from Bjørvika, Oslo. Forms inspired by archaeological ceramics found in Bjørvika by the Norwegian Maritime Museum. The ceramics were used in mediaeval food events and sold at the Maritime Museum shop.



Overgang, 2022



Bricks – Selvbyggeren, 2022–23



The Medieval Oslo Clay Series, 2017

SOIL HISTORY
THE UNDERGROUND
EXTRACTION
TRANSFORMATIONS

These works will form a cohesive visual identity, although they will evolve through time and place in different locations inside and outside of the museum. I want the public to be able to experience the processes that are involved in creating the works and discover how they are connected. I will document the processes and will make some of it available to the public.

In November 2022, Carola, Shubhangi, Germain, Jim, myself and the curators met in person for the first time in Oslo. We went to the Cultural History Museum as well as to Bygdøy to see the old museum and the construction of the new museum. We had a meeting with Lars Gornæs from Statsbygg and Thomas Pedersen from AART architects, among others, and they confirmed that there was a lot of clay on the site, but quick clay which may be difficult to use. After the meeting they showed us around the construction site. I saw a soil-like pile in the northwestern corner of the lot and sneaked over to find clay that seemed good to form in my hands. The quick clay had to be deeper in the ground, something that was confirmed later. Finding the clay made me sure about saying yes to being part of this group and project.

In February 2023 I continued researching the soil by visiting the site again. Instead of trying to find information from a distance, through reading and going to the library, I always start interacting with the clay and talking to peo-

ple at the location where I will be working. At that point they were digging some two-metre-deep, long ditches for pipes, and we were allowed to inspect the holes. There was a fine layer of melting fresh snow covering everything, so I could see the soil and the wet dark-grey clay here and there. Standing face to face with this land, being beneath what seemed to be the surface of the ground, made me feel calm, protected and connected – feelings I would like to share with more people.

I brought a sample of clay back to the studio. I wedged it without adding more water or sifting it. I put it straight on my throwing wheel. One method of checking if the clay is good for ceramic purposes is by throwing with it, trimming the bottom and firing it. While planning to go back to the construction site to see if I could get more information from the location and the material, I threw gifts for the people I would like to invite into the clay hole with me.

I asked two people that I trust and have worked with previously to come with me: the archaeologist Christian R. Løchsen and geologist Henrik H. Svensen. The idea was for us to share how we read the clay, soil and location from our specific fields. I started the meeting inside the construction hole giving out the ceramic tumblers I had made from the clay. I had brought tap water from the workers' barracks that we drank from the ceramics. Witnessing drinking water that had been transported from the lakes surrounding Oslo through the ground in intricate pipe systems, meeting the fossilised ground as

ceramic cups, by lips from these bodies standing in a clay hole at Bygdøy was a great moment for me. Below are video stills from the meeting, filmed by Thomas Nikolai Olsen.

Two to three thousand years ago this top layer of clay was formed. Exactly where we stand now, based on what we can see here, we know that there has been a north-facing bay, with stagnant water where the clay has only been sprinkling down slowly on the seabed. In the Viking Age, this was a forest floor near the fjord. And the water stood 3-4 meters higher than today. Bygdøy was, of course, an island one could sail around.

Amazing that you know that just from being here! From a ceramist's perspective, the oxidized clay, the one that's a bit brown, is better to work with. It was very nice to throw with this darker one though. The way I test if the clay is good is to make a coil and try to make a knot. If it doesn't crack too much, it's good for ceramic processes. It means it's flexible. What do you think about being here, Christian?

The fact that we're standing in this clay pit is interesting archeologically because we're here at the Viking Ship Museum. These Viking ships were indeed buried in clay. That's why they are so well-preserved. Here, from an archeological perspective, I would be most interested in the topsoil layer. There's a lot of disturbed context here. Then I would look just beneath that layer, under the stones and where the soil meets the clay. That is usually where we find archeology that's more or less intact. I can't see anything here, but I assume there was careful investigation here before this construction project began.



Illustration by Sigrid with transcriptions from the video



Henrik, Sigrid and Christian down in the construction hole drinking water from the ceramic cups.



Sigrid testing the clay at the location.

The Body Feeds

Collective Proposal
for the Museum Cafe

Every site needs a space for pause and collectivity. Cafes often act as catalysts for such activities – places of being with strangers while still being contained within a common context. The cafe at a museum isn't removed from the politics, identities, histories or policies of the museum that the cafe is contained within. Though the rules aren't the same, a cafe in these cases is not a heterotopia but rather a spillover of the museum itself. By extension, it is a site of discourse and a potent one for continuing previously unfinished conversations.

In addition to producing their own works in the aforementioned form(s), Sigrid, Shubhangi, Carola, Germain and Jim hope to carry the spillovers from those works into the cafe area, therefore blurring the boundaries between what is regarded as a space for exhibiting, sharing and receiving and what is not.

We have had regular physical and digital meetings from November 2022 and will continue up until the museum opens in 2026. Developing our works this way, not in competition with each other, but through conversations is a rare and helpful way to work with commissions. Being five very different people with different ways of working has posed a lot of questions and initiated good conversations, and we would like to share some of this spirit through a collective biscuit and ceramics collection for the cafeteria. The cookies will be for sale and the biscuits will be for serving.

Cafes often hold a jar of fresh biscuits to sell as a quick, easy to grab snack. We would like to work with the cafe's contractors by providing them with custom-printed biscuit stamps for the biscuits at the cafe. We would also like to design limited-edition ceramicware for the cafe, stamped with texts that relate to each of the works. The text may be either a short question or combination of words that intend to provoke a query that has metastasised from the original work, transferred onto the biscuit and the ceramics. When the biscuit is consumed, the provocation becomes part of the consumer's body. If one is what they eat, then this little question (that

the consumer would have ironically paid for) – though broken and chewed gets absorbed by the body upon digestion, attaching itself to the body from within.

Once eaten, do the queries then feel like sticky toffee stuck in the nook of the teeth? Constantly present yet inaccessible to the tongue? Or does it continue to swirl within the body like unsettled dust? Do the questions cluster and congeal becoming an unavoidable clump within? How long does it take for the non-physical to become physical? But weren't the questions always physical if they were once something solid that was ground between one's teeth?

The ceramics will be made with the clay that is extracted from Sigrid's work *The Underground* in the park outside of the Museum. The design process will happen in a self organised workshop format in one of our physical meetings and the production will be made by Sigrid and/or others with ceramic skills. The biscuits will be commissioned from a bakery. Eating and drinking from the fossilised ground is yet another way of experiencing it.

Does it change the way you congest a question, being able to see and touch it with your hands and lips?

These works proposed for the cafe intend to work in tandem with the cafe's contractors. We understand that the contractors could change over time and hence, the work would be written into a soft contract with the museum that would ensure and enable the continuity of the artworks as per their intended use. This contract could be reviewed every ten (?) years to provide a moment of re-evaluation to:

- a) Review the relationship of the work with the cafe/cafe-runners
- b) Review if the texts on the stamp need to be changed or updated

The intention to work in the cafe is to explore ways to arrive at the larger conversation had

by the artists around the project from multiple directions. The consumption of images and form is challenged when the form is broken down (as in the biscuits) or when it becomes largely utilitarian (as in the case of the ceramicware). Even though objects serve the consumer 'directly', the transaction is still hyphenated and conditional.



Are you proud to be a Viking?, clay sample by Sigrid Espelien



Sketch by Sigrid Espelien



Conceptual sketches by Shubhangi Singh



Conceptual sketches by Sigrid Espelien



Proposals

Elisabeth Haarr

+

The Ingstad Monument

In 1992, when KORO was still called Utsmykningsfondet, the institution purchased a work by the Norwegian artist Elisabeth Haarr (b. Hamar, 1945). The tapestry, which is untitled in KORO's archive, was originally made some twenty years earlier, in 1971, for an NHO course venue in Asker, outside of Oslo. When that venue was closed and vacated, one of the employees was given the tapestry as a gift. Egil Sinding Larsen, KORO's director at the time, got word of this and bought the work for 40,000 NOK. It hung in KORO's offices at Kristin Augusts gate in Oslo until 2020, when those premises too were vacated. It has been in KORO's storage ever since.

KORO's curators and the group of artists invited to collaborate on the Museum of the Viking Age public art project together propose to include this work. We would like to identify a placement for it in the existing building, in dialogue with the museum staff and the architects.

The proposal stems from a motif in Haarr's piece – a lone figure in space next to a large group of figures – which becomes something of an emblem for this project's experiment at the crossroads of individual and collective work.

This motif is further strengthened by the relevance of Viking history to Haarr's broader art practice, namely that over six decades the artist has developed primarily textile work influenced by Norwegian material history, travel and maritime culture, among other ideas. The historical and material culture of southern Norway in particular has been key to her work: 'I've been interested in what kinds of textile production people have been engaged in here in Norway, and I've been interested in the lives of women along the coast,' Haarr has said when describing the inspiration for her work. 'One could say that modern Norwegian textile art [...] arises directly from the general production of textiles by women along the Norwegian coast,' she continued, a tradition that we can trace back to the mediaeval period.

While a precise location has not yet been identified, we propose hanging the work on a wall in the existing building, or perhaps in the cafe area. An exact proposal will be worked out in dialogue between KORO and collaborators from the museum and University of Oslo together with the architects.



Elisabeth Haarr, untitled, 1971
Woven hemp, wool and coloured nylon
105 x 234 cm





Nils Aas, *Anne Stine og Helge Ingstad*, 2001
Bronze and stainless steel, the Viking Age Museum
Photo: Emilie Netskar

The Ingstad Monument is a sculptural work by the artist Nils Aas in the University of Oslo's art collection (UiO.K.01201). Since 2001, it has been installed outdoors on the north-east side of the Oseberg wing of the existing Viking Ship House. The sculpture depicts Anne Stine Ingstad and Helge Ingstad as life-size bronze busts resting on a granite plinth bearing the inscription 'De oppdaget vikingenes Amerika' (They discovered the Vikings' America). The bust is accompanied by a 16-metre stainless steel arch which spans overhead. A sister sculpture was also erected in L'Anse aux Meadows, in Canada, where the Ingstad's made certain significant archaeological finds regarding the Vikings' westernmost journeys. The work at Bygdøy will be demounted and stored as a result of the building project, a process which is managed by UiO and scheduled to take place in the first half of 2024.

Since the new museum project was launched, a process has been underway within UiO to reconsider the placement of the statue within the site of the new Museum of the Viking Age. While this work is not officially part of KORO's 'oppdragsbrev' and KORO has not been involved in previous dialogue with the artist's estate, KORO and UiO agreed that it would be natural to see a new placement of this work within a holistic context of KORO's art plans for the new museum, which include other outdoor sculptural works described in this document.

Within this process, a proposal for a new location within the transformed VTM site has been identified in collaboration between KORO, UiO and the landscape architects. This is in the green area established by the bus roundabout in the north-east corner of the site. From a holistic and curatorial perspective, KORO believes this will be a strong placement. The site would allow for high visibility and a unique viewing experience, particularly for the thousands of visitors who come to the museum by bus, as they will get a near 360-degree view of the steel arch upon arriving at the museum. The placement also contributes positively to binding the new museum's entire plot of land together as one continuous entity, an important premise of the landscape project emphasised by the new walking pathway in the park that encircles the entire museum and leads directly to the new proposed location.

Dialogue with all relevant parties, including managers of the artist's estate, will be important in finalising this proposal over the coming months. Responsibility for costs related to the moving of the work requires further clarification between Statsbygg, UiO and KORO.



Monument to Helge Ingstad and his wife, Anne Stine, in L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site at the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula of the island of Newfoundland

Biographies

CAROLA GRAHN

Carola Grahn (Jokkmokk, 1982) is a Sami visual artist based in Sweden. She makes thematic, idea-based work, in large projects, mainly involving the materialisation of text, installation strategies and sculptural mediums. Grahn has been awarded the Asmund and Lizzie Arles Sculpture Prize 2021 and has received several grants. She is represented in the collections of Moderna Museet, Mercedes-Benz Art Collection Berlin, Public Art Agency Sweden and Konstmuseet i Norr, among others. She has written about Sami art for *Afterall* magazine, co-edited an issue of *The Vessel* with Norwegian Crafts as well as the *Hjärnstorm* special issue about Sápmi, and self-published her novel *Lo & Professorn* (Lo and the Professor). Grahn has a MFA from The Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm and her works have been shown at IAIA Museum Of Contemporary Native Arts, Santa Fe; Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Montreal; Southbank Centre, London; Office of Contemporary Art Norway; Bergen Kunsthall; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and Bildmuseet Umeå, among many others.

GERMAIN NGOMA

Germain Ngoma (Zimbabwe, 1953) began his artistic career in Lusaka, Zambia, in the early 1970s. He relocated to Oslo for art school in 1982 at Statens kunstakademi (National Art Academy).

His work has been exhibited in group shows and solo presentations in Norway at, among others, Kunstnernes Hus, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo Kunstforening, Kunstnerforbundet, Khartoum Contemporary Art Center, Tenthaus, Galleri F15, as well as internationally in Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom and Zambia.

He emphasises the relationship between objects and artwork, between man and art. The sculptures point back to his upbringing with objects that had a limited lifespan. Some objects could be reproduced and reused, while others became worthless. His choice of materials and process reflects this.

JIM SÆRNBLOM

Jim Særnbloom (Oslo, 1977) is a writer and artist living in Oslo. He has an MFA from the National Academy Of Art. He made his debut as a writer with his book *TRANS* in 2022, exhibited in the National Museum of Art. Coming from the arts, Særnbloom has a unique literary expression, creating a space of its own between short prose and poetry. As one of a few Norwegian authors writing from an LGBTQ+ perspective he seeks to expand the language and break with stereotypical expectations of representation. His art and writing often have a basis in the same premise: the absurd language is the most fitting to express outsidership. His art, whether literary or visual, is characterised as new but recognisable, fresh but also sick, in the sense that the world and humanity are sick.

At the moment, Særnbloom lives on an island in Lofoten working with sculpture and teaches writing at Nordland Filmkunstskole.

SHUBHANGI SINGH

Shubhangi Singh's practice often draws upon existing knowledges to address movement and identity, and queries related to the body and its relationship with the environment. Singh considers ideas of absence and absenting in her work as a way of reflecting upon what is visible, particularly in relation to history, memory and the labour of memorialising. Working across media, from text to moving image and site-specific installations, Singh's works are routinely suspended between fiction and non-fiction, often adopting the position of an unreliable narrator.

SIGRID ESPELIEN

Sigrid Espelien (Gjøvik, 1984) is a process artist working with local clay as her medium and collaborator. She has a ceramic art degree from the Glass and Ceramics School in Bornholm, Denmark (2005–8) and an MFA from the ceramics department at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, USA (2010–12). Moving back to Oslo after ten years abroad, she started exploring the marine clay (blåleire) near the city from artistic, technical, and sociopolitical perspectives.

Espelien taught at the art and craft department of the Oslo National Academy of Art between 2017–20. She is currently a PhD fellow in artistic research at the Oslo National Academy of Art with the project *Grounding With (Blue) Clay* (2020–24). She has exhibited widely and is part of the collection at KODE museum in Bergen. Since 2019 Espelien has been engaged in art in public space projects at Økern and Dronning Ingrids Hage housing for people with dementia in Oslo. Her main drive is to explore clay as landscape, land and soil through art processes and conversations with different groups of people.



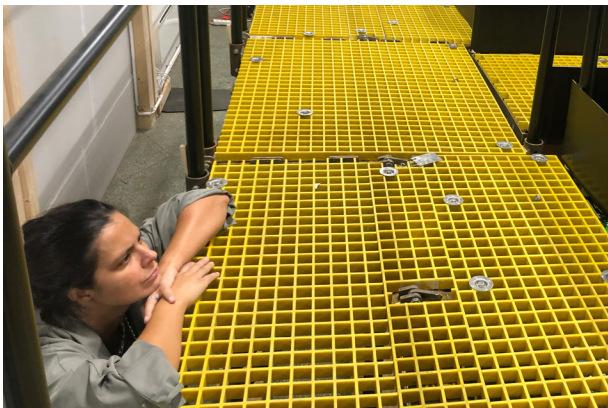
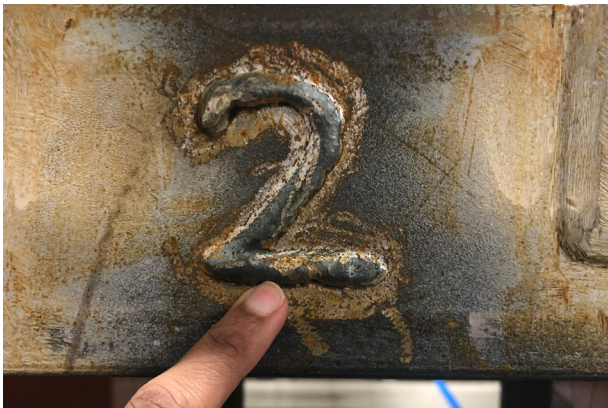
In the autumn of 2022, we did a bit of research on Arnstein Arneberg and public art in Oslo. Top: us wandering through Oslo City Hall, which is important on both topics. Bottom: a visit to Do Ho Suh's public work *Grass Roots Square*, 2012, then outside of the R6 building in central Oslo.



Top: a model at one of our meetings with Statsbygg
Bottom: an artifact stored in one of the climatized rooms on site at Bygdøy



More inspecting artifacts, more walks around Oslo, more site visits to Bygdøy, more meetings in strange hotel conference rooms in Vika. In the last pic, Jim is standing in front of the Oseberg ship, enshrined in the elevated shock resistant rig and draped in a solemn sail-like fabric.



There was an especially nice visit to the purpose-built climate-controlled rooms on site inside the old Viking Ship House at Bygdøy that houses the Viking sleds. NRK made a show about how they moved them here on tracks at approximately one metre per hour. We learned a lot! There was also time for octopus on Bernt Ankers gate in Oslo.



At the old Viking Ship House at Bygdøy

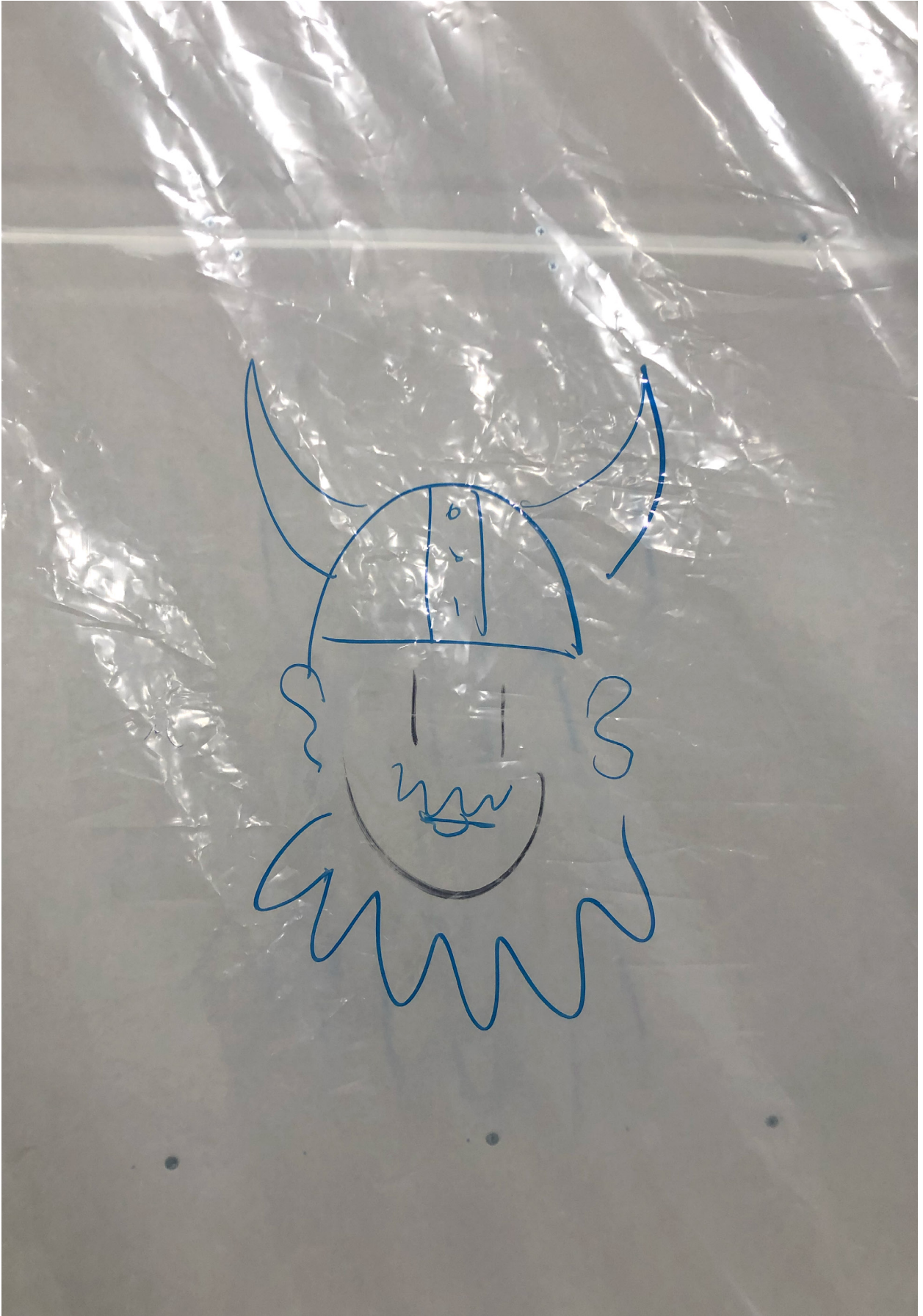




Germain and Sigríð at the site



Carola, Germain and Jim inspecting a rig



MEDIATION
AND
COMMUNICATION

KORO will develop mediation plans to unfold alongside the projects proposed in this document.

The mediation and communication plans may take a variety of different paths, and more concrete planning will be described in future plans. A standard KORO communications package, including information on its website and social media channels, documentation of works and physical signage will follow the project launch. More in-depth initiatives, such as artist interviews and film documentation, a publication and public programming activities will also be explored. The intention is to create synergies between the various projects and bring the ideas and activities of the art project to different publics.

The shift from 'Viking *ship* house' to 'Viking *time* museum' described in the original strategy document and in the curators' note at the beginning of this book is seen as a useful framework for conceptualising plans for mediation. We propose to follow this nominal transition, from 'ship' to 'time', from the object to temporal subject, as we explore, reflect and expand upon the project and the work of the artist group in more public-facing ways.

Possibilities for public programming, including gatherings, seminars, workshops and performances, exist both along the process and as the project moves towards a conclusion later in the decade. Collaboration with academics from a range of fields, specialists in public space, authors, and other artists are all seen as relevant possibilities.

We also aim to have an open dialogue around mediation plans with the museum staff along the way, hopefully finding synergies between the art project and the museum's exhibition and mediation planning more broadly.

BUDGET
KORO / ART PROJECT / 2021–27
MUSEUM OF THE VIKING AGE

Total art project	17,900,000 NOK
Project administration	2,685,000 NOK
Pre-project, artist group (2022–24)	1,250,000 NOK

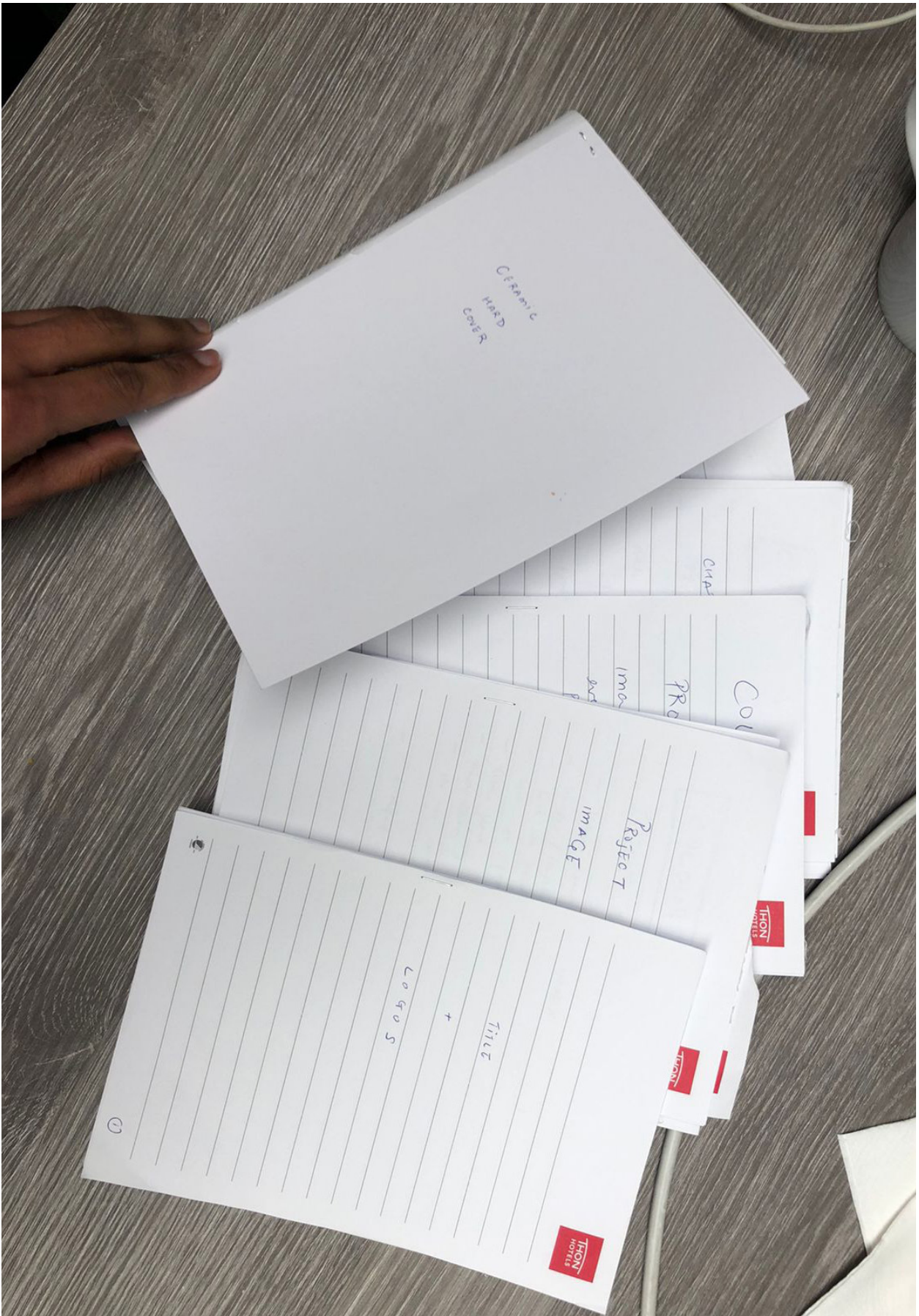
Main projects / artist group (2024–27)	11,600,000 NOK
Art project 1, production and fees	
Art project 2, production and fees	
Art project 3, production and fees	
Art project 4, production and fees	
Art project 5, production and fees	

The Body Feeds – collective proposal	300,000 NOK
Elisabeth Haarr – existing work	100,000 NOK

Total main projects – artist group (production + fees)	12,000,000 NOK
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Mediation and Education	800,000 NOK
Management and Conservation	400,000 NOK

Subtotal	17,135,000 NOK
Contingency	765,000 NOK
TOTAL	17,900,000 NOK



Conceptual sketch of the publication



Shubhangi's mastermind quote

The New Museum of the Viking Age
Proposals for Public Art
KORO

Artists

Carola Grahn
Germain Ngoma
Jim Særnblom
Shubhangi Singh
Sigrid Espelien

With historical work by
Elisabeth Haarr

Curated by
Mechu Rapela
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Image courtesy
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Courtesy of AART/SLA/Statsbygg/UiO

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This book represents proposals for public art projects to be realised over the forthcoming years. Plans and details are subject to change.

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