Metaplasm

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Image 1: Metaplasm, costume, film and sound, (Holmön, Sweden, 2021), https://vimeo.com/556678413

ABSTRACT

In this paper I look at my practice and master project through a broader lens – tying it with theoretical concepts in particular that of Rosi Braidotti's book *Metamorphoses* becoming woman-animal-insect. I show how my practical and theoretical dimensions meet through the mediums and narratives I work with. Performance and ritual centralize the practice whilst crafted objects and residue is significant in the process using the materials of wood, textile and clay. I have this year introduced gold as embodied practice by eating it- I mention alchemy in that respect as an inward essence. *Metaplasm* is the title of the master project incorporating the fleshy and linguistic signifier coined by Donna Harraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, in 2016, as my project unfold into text, performance and crafted sculptures.

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INTRODUCTION

In my project; *Metaplasm*- I look at relational bodies and hybrid notions of human, animal and the vegetative. In using my own body as a performative element, I become the gallery in having costume, totems and adornments as supplementary yet powerful tools to bridge and enhance a plural voice that belongs to multiple bodies. I place myself within various watery/forest/coastal environments in Scandinavia doing actions of swampy and earthly gesture as well as oral reciting. I work with found objects along crafted material such as textile, clay, wood and metal. I am currently working on including gold in the installations which resemble an elevated state and sacrifice to place in my projects.

My work as an artist moves between practices of performance, poetic cinematography and installation of crafted objects. It is a context-based practice concerned with geo-bodies, hydro-feminism and rituals—all of which are themes that encourage living in tune with the landscape and spiritual and natural forces. Central to my practice is a connection to place and openness toward non-human, vegetative and planetary bodies through performative engagements with the surrounding environment. I record my engagements with the landscape through sound, film and photography, which then reveal the landscape as an imaginative force in relation to my own body.

In *Metaplasm* I am interested in testing performativity in crafted objects and filmatic settings that exemplify research and theoretical contexts that I am interested in. I therefore look into and identify with Braidotti's book *Metamorphoses* from 2002 as a becoming of woman –animal - insect.

As an artist I place myself in the field of hydro-feminism, post-human temporalities and ecological care - doing field-trips, collaborations and collective exchanges as ways to build situational knowledge and research material. In this paper I will look into detail of the contextual framework of my practice, touch upon certain thematics that ties *Metaplasm* with practice and theory.

Originally the term 'Metaplasm' is from Greek metaplasmos, meaning remolding. It is a generic term for intentional and unintentional alteration of a word. Donna Harraway in "Manifestly Haraway" says "There is a biological taste to Metaplasm- just what I like in words about words. Flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds: these are joined in naturecultures. 'Metaplasm' can signify a

mistake, a stumbling, a probing that makes a fleshly difference". I feel a resonance with the probing and fleshiness of the word 'Metaplasm' and I think it is suited as the title of my project as it relates to performativity and gesture in my films and land-based works.

THEORY AND CONTEXT

MINERAL HUMAN

The film *Metaplasm* that I have worked on for the last year will be shown as part of my final show at Konstfack. I journeyed to Holmön in North Sweden to shoot it- the island is characterized by water, stones, forest and a large patch of sand. It was late April so the snow was still partly resting onto the forest floor and the backdrop was then sand, forest and snow. A perfect match for my watery, sandy and swampy interest within the forest ecosystem. I quickly decided that it would be my spot, I put on my costume, set up my camera and left the moment to decide my actions. I had no pre-planning only that I would approach the sedimentary ground as a moving being carrying along my two residual objects found in the area - a reindeer bone and a stick. As the performance evolved these residual objects became elongated parts of my body – I dragged them-I put them onto my body. I used the reindeer bone as a vessel in which to pour the sand as a magical powder, I threatened my surroundings by pointing out the antlers stick from my body. (To my surprise the stick was stolen on the train ride home to Stockholm as I left it with my bag in the luggage area).

The sand became intimately part of my being, I connected to the mineral world in particular Silica that exists in the sand, reindeer bone and our own bone skeleton. It made me realize how we as human beings are distanced from the ground we're treading through our upright stature - my eyes were levelled with the watery and sedimentary surfaces and therefor felt a belonging with it.

¹ Donna Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto", in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

BECOMING WOMAN - insect

I have throughout writing this paper greatly sympathized with Rosi Braidotti's theories and book *Metamorphoses* and see a strong resonance of it in my practice and in particular Metaplasm.² I will go further into the reasons why below.

As transformation, cycles and metamorphoses are factors in the work and experiences that I put myself into - It is as if the landscape and its beings work their way into my psyche and become a unifying entity through concentrated devotion and actions on my part. Braidotti concludes; "Becoming woman, animal, insect is an affect that flows, like writing, it is a composition, a location that needs to be constructed together with, that is to say in the encounter with, others".³

The circling of the idea of becoming woman as an untanglement from a hegemonic framework and binary thinking is interesting. The becoming-minority and nomad is based on the feminine. A creative becoming that is dynamic and norm-critical - to sum up a de-personalization of the subject into a flow. I can through my performative actions and rituals identify with such becoming in doing actions that unlearn my human stature into let's say a being that crawl in a sedimentary setting.

Braidotti says:

All becomings are minoritarian - becoming is a persistent challenge and an opposition to Molar, steady identities. Internally self-contradictory becoming can best be expressed by figurations; the wasp and the orchid, the woman and the turning of the waves, the sound and the fury signifying nothing. The process of becoming woman-animal, in fact, is not about signification, but rather the opposite: it is about the transcendence of the linguistic signifier. What it asserts is the potency of expression.⁴

In studying her text I envision my practice as a form of figuration that express this potential of becoming and in it's essence is minoritarian in opposition to steady identities. In essence a norm-critical practice that is conjured with critical thinking as Braidotti says; "Thinking can be critical if by critical mean the

² Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Polity Books, 2002)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

active, assertive process of inventing new images of thought." Metaplasm invent these new images and thoughts - a probing both through linguistic and visual/material matter.

Braidotti uses the term 'philosophical nomadology' that favours the unity of mind and body a phase in which thinking is like breathing preceding self-reflexivity. I will say that nomadology is at the core of the practice as I develop projects by initial observation, meditation and attentive thinking through placing my body in a specific environment - I come to know my subject in an embodied way. The audio/visual material of my performative films become a type of thinking/breathing at work – a form of self-reflexivity in which text, audio, craft and performance is explored.



Image 2: Ålvik, (Bergen 2020)

As I've started to sense the vastness of the subject of being a woman, I probe as animal, as insect and as micromatter be it metals and residue. In thinking of a potential universal field in which there's one unifying voice that flows and merges with all is intriguing as a contextual framework to my artistic process. Many artists do feel like they're channels of an otherworldly flow. The performative space becomes a channel in which objects play a role of ritual quality. They become sculptural hybrids of my

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⁵ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, (Polity Books, 2002)

imaginary world in which these boundaries are blurred. Potentially I could become a hybrid of human and sedimentary qualities living of eating gold and drinking water. In this becoming I am learning new skillsets in my life and expanding my emotional intelligence.

NARRATIVE

Metaplasm as film evokes a sci-fi feel and quality -blurring the boundaries of human and the non-human. The setting, objects and movements are carefully selected and hand-crafted. I make the costume I am wearing and the sculptural objects within the film. The film usually centres on a ritual in which repetitive gestures are performed. I believe it is strongly embedded within the context of craft, because it is material-based with thoughtful hand-crafted techniques. The film format captures the various mediums of crafted objects, performative gestures, narrative, sound and atmosphere. In merging the crafted material and digital mediums as a bonding between the fine art and craft field.

In the performative space a temporal timeline lingers into being, a concentrated impact of gesture, a slowing down and appointed magic emanate. A probing, a gift, a ritual that grows on me as artist and hopefully audience too. As I work with adding sound, text and writing to the narrative of the performative films (such as in 96 Karat of Gold). The concept of Metaplasm resonates as it crystallizes a poetic reflection and fleshy signifying voice. Where does the voice come from -is it subjective belonging to space, otherworldly or human? What is the inherent dialectic that emerge in becoming a cosmic voice through text – am I a woman, animal and insect? By adding text as voice an additional factor is expressed in the film and carries a narrative with expanded linguistic factor and meaning.

POETIC CINEMATOGRAPHY

In *Metaplasm*, sound has been added onto the clips to set an atmosphere of deep immersion and ritualistic feeling. We're entering a time zone beyond the linear in which we greet our fluid past and future with all types of beings from residual, mineral, insect, animal and human. Astrida Neimanis in *Bodies of Water* coins Hydro feminism as a fluid space - temporal time zones meet and merge with all life forms. My performative practice enables such space to flourish.

⁶ Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017)

My films become instruments of poetic cinematography consisting of nature clips that are edited, juxtaposed and layered. Along the performative crafted rituals that extend into text and sound. The cinematography becomes an instrument of research, reflective thought and poetic resonance of that which is non-human. Mirroring thinking as making.

I want to draw from the creature and insect like gesture in the film by referring to the book *The Transformative Power of Performance* by Erika Fisker-Lichte (2004) she writes about the use of animals live in performance such as Joseph Beuys and notes:

The live animal body remains elusive. Similar to the human body it attains the status of an event rather than a finished work of art. In this crucial sense man and animal are alike. What fascinates the audience about the animal's appearance onstage is the sense of unpredictability. With the animal onstage reality invades fiction, chance enters into order, nature into culture. Similar to the human body it attains the status of an event rather than a finished work of art. In this crucial sense man and animal are alike.⁷

REMOLDING

Metaplasm remolds hierarchies and normative thinking by switching of roles, layered communication and interrelations. In moving forward we need to step back, observe, gently and playfully figure out our roles and who we want to be as species. In digging into sci-fi, performative and ritual we can explore gestures and patterns that extend our understanding of our bodies and our environment.

One could almost imagine a cyborg or otherworldly figure that is a hybrid -wearing a hand-made costume- embedded in a particular environment. The residue and collected material form part of this and contextualize new material beginnings. As most of my projects begin with observation and walks in site-specific spots getting familiar with its residue and geology.

⁷ Erika Fisker-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance* (Routledge, 2009)

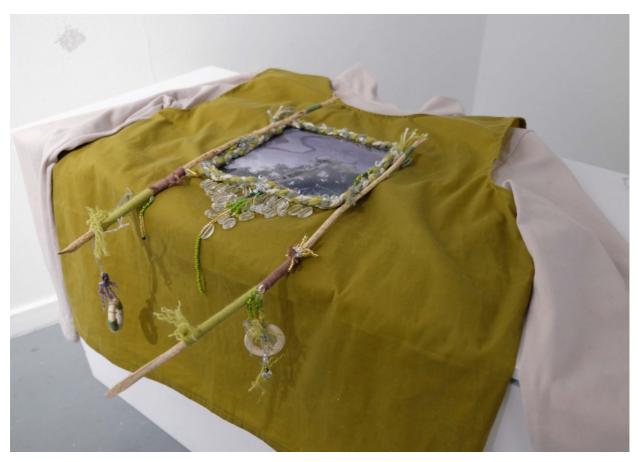


Image 3: costume for performance, wax cotton, printed photograph, beads, pearls and residue, (Stockholm 2021)

As we face increased climate change and environmental threats an imaginary future must start to be expressed in our vision, we must dare to imagine another way of experiencing ourselves and the environment. If such thought is utopic certainly the reality is a looming illusion of earths capacity and resources to maintain a species that does not understand earth as a living being that is greedy, that rapes. If art is one of the few place in which one can start imagine a new future- that still makes an attempt- that tries to be trueful do human experience that allows unheard voices to emanate, that dares to be open and vulnerable not based on economic, monetary and corporate abstractions. We will be closer to indigenous ways of being and understanding of our environment- the key could lie in our imagination. It looks like scientific models are failing us and art on the other hand offer something important and radical.

The lived experience, the encounter with material and beings is what is centred in artistic experiences. To be anew and unlearn oneself. To become ahuman as Patricia Mac Cormack notes in the book *The Ahuman Manifesto* 2020.⁸

METHODS AND MATERIALS

RECEPTIVE TRACES

As an artist I am open for spaces and places to reveal themselves- my method would be to walk and meditate within them. As a human being I am interested to see how the landscape shapes itself upon my bodily and sensorial cartography and choreography. How traces are left on surfaces that map other beings, wind, weather and other intelligent species that crawl and leave patterns. I see a kinship in the way an insect travels and form traces of their life patterns onto residue - even carries it as a form of elongated embodiment or jewellery. I want my performative practice to capture these ways of being in which I as human being reciprocate other life forms as well as emanate a thinking that goes with nature. The methods of such thinking involves spontaneity, unpredictability, probing and openness.

Spending time in remote nature environments doing activities of walking, observing, meditating so that it become part of my being, thinking and making. The space works its way through bodily sensations and impressions. I keep a diary, collect residue and place it into figurative patterns. I unlearn my human becoming, I trace back to ancient rhythms and slow becoming. I experience grounding again - I learn to follow the flow – to build up a trust with my surroundings – an unfolding kinship to its living material and beings. I search for my spirit to become present through my work- alike an alchemical process of transformation and metamorphoses. Ritual is a channel or gateway to emanate this process of becoming and growth.

⁸ Patricia MacCormack, *The Ahuman Manifesto* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020)

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Image 4: Elemental Bodies, Land-based performance, KH Messen residency, Ålvik (Norway 2020)

In Norske Kunsthåndverkernes magazine *Årsutstillingen* (The Annual Exhibition), 2021 the archaeologist Per Ditlef Fredriksen has written an introductory text titled "Wayfaring With Materials". He says:

The new direction the world has taken has made it clearer to us all that we have always wandered along paths that are open-ended. And regardless of our awareness of the future – or the past – we weave such insights into what we are doing in the here and now, into what we create. The process of making a work of art is also very much a form of wandering. During the working process, artists create their own understanding or interpretation, through their fingertips and by engaging intimately with the materials, and in this manner creating a new path, all the time drawing on acquired knowledge and experience. ⁹

Wayfaring resonates a lot to me as an artist that works in remote landscapes within the field of art and craft. In my residency at SiM Korpulfstadir in Iceland I spent every day for a month working along it's

⁹ Per Ditlef Fredriksen, "Wayfaring with Materials", in *Årsutstillingen* (2021)

coast in the cold May weather. The landscape carved its way into my body and I very much sensed the presence of life and death through bones, remains, as well as living beings. The unique geographical strata of stone and mountain formations were startling. In that time I resonated a lot with Søren Kierkegaard's phrase "The more a person limits himself [sic], the more resourceful he [sic] becomes." ¹⁰ In using found materials and sustainable thinking as potential for exploration of material. My land-based works took on a figurative form, textural patterns that ignite the landscape and attributes to its latent qualities. The process became a ritual of repetitive gestures that amplified a spatial and spiritual currency. The sea made eye contact in the last days and it was if it sensed my devotion and presence. In response to this experience I wrote for the online magazine MAI Feminism and Visual Culture:

By paying mindful attention to small details—such as the textures and colours of nature—I developed a connection with Gorvik (Iceland) during my daily walks, as if I were becoming a part of its soil. Fuelled by instinct, the photographs presented here came about as 'on-the-spot' and spontaneous interactions—the loving result of repetitive gestures, though seemingly mundane, became akin to ritualistic actions. These images are formed out of my desire to open up and fine-tune my consciousness with/to the spirit of the Icelandic landscape. In creating from local residue rather than acquiring new material, I have gained a sense of joy and purposefulness.

TOUCH AS INTIMACY

The role of touch is important to me in shaping my clay objects as well as the surfaces that are carved with patterns and words by the use of a pencil. I write descriptive words like flow, life, water into the clay emphasizing a personal imprint and intimacy. I make galvanized metal objects as well in which I replicate the same method. I have recently got familiar to clay being in the craft program and it suits my wish to make vessels for my installations that contain material residue or new media such as a tablet.

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¹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, Either/Or: A Fragment of Life (Penguin Classic, 1843)



Image 5: Crawl, clay box, (Stockholm 2021)

I can see traces of figurative origin in my work on surfaces and as a visual narrated framework. Being the figure that roams in the sand dunes, that picks up a reindeer bone and branch to become elongated pieces of one's body - serving as ritualistic tools in connection to the environment. The forest becoming a space with intimacy and imagination.

GOLD



Image 6: Gold Installation, Konstfack, (Stockholm 2021)

The idea of using gold in a project earlier this year was sparked during a research trip for a site-specific class project in Norra Törnen this autumn 2021. We were led onto the rooftop where the wind was strong and left my hair messy — on descending I noticed that I was missing one of my gold earrings. It made me think of gold as medium both in alchemical thinking and as part of a ritual. It striked me how the elemental forces were working their way through my hair - unleashing the gold into the wind perhaps now laying on the floor or ground somewhere symbolic or as a sacrifice. The thought of how buildings themselves are ultimately formed of natural material and built to withstand forces of nature. Inside of the Norra Tornen the boundaries of inside /outside feels blurred punctuated by the large glass windows that makes one feel as much part of the outside. The flat became a concentrated space for reflection and ritual. In a flat the domestic qualities are also present and the idea of eating gold came to mind as a form of embodiment and offering. As I recite in the film "I ate the gold that was shed by the wind. I saluted the cardinal directions by eating gold paper of 18karat for each direction".



Image 7: Gold Water, Performance film, text and sound, (Norra Tärnen Stockholm 2021) Link https://vimeo.com/646979923

In the book *Alchemy* by Titus Burckhardt according to the famous Moslem Muhyi `d-Din ibn Àrabi` gold corresponds to the sound and original condition of the soul which freely and without distortion reflects

the Divine Spirit in its essence.¹¹ Each base metal represents a break in the equilibrium which gold alone exhibits.

ALCHEMY

In eating the gold metal as I did in Gold Water- a fully form of embodiment occur worthy of reflection in relation to raw matter and alchemy as a symbolic embodiment. We shift perspective going from a traditionally hard material to a soft digestible one becoming part of my bio-physical connection as haptic experience. Although it is a staged ritual of performative gesture and haptic activity, the act itself is ritualistic. An epitomizing of my effort over the years of working outdoors with the elemental forces. I will turn to my bodily presence and use my senses to connect intimately with the material of gold. In alchemy gold is reverted back to its original state that of Materia Prima. Being affected by weather, wind, erosion – sundry forms of mercury, iron, lead, gold, sulfur, salt, salt, vinegar, water, air, fire, earth, blood, the water of life.

It is interesting to think of the vitrine space of Norra Tärnen as a spatial epitomy of alchemy and the use of the word vitriol for alchemy is extremely significant. I am not surprised that the collective field-trip to Norra Törnen led me into alchemy as subject. The inside-out turned somehow reflects an essence of soul language. The idea of an inner and outer symbiosis through terminologies of elemental forces that are both material existing facsimiled as psychic qualities/ symbol- thus in essence underlies our premapped physiognomy and corporeal cartography defined as cosmic forces. We can hereby see ourselves as embedded in cosmic thinking, cycles and the dualities of attraction/opposition.

COLLECTIVITY

As residencies, collaborations and collective initiations form part of my practice it is important for me to mention these experiences in this paper. I recently collaborated with NY based artist Zoe Hart – we were residents at Björkö residency in December 2021 curated by Anna Viola Hallberg. Our shared passion for nature led to the exploration of moss and lichen rich in the local area through sound, film,

¹¹ Titus Burkhardt, *Alchemy* (Element Books, 1991)

and performance. We made a film including performative acts with the title; Lyttersken, meaning closelisteners - as we softly tap the drum, the pulse, and breath into being by exercises of embodying moss.



Image 8: Lyttersken, film 10:44 min performance, sound and text, 2021, Björkö residency, (Stockholm Archipelago 2021)

I have also collaborated with Anastasia Savinova (master student at Umeå Art Accademy) in April 2021. We spent four days at Holmön, two days collecting, a day preparing the net and a day filming. The collected driftwood and sticks we applied onto a fishing net that we wore as a costume for a planned choreographed movement. Our shared fondness for tracking along the coast picking up found objects was great — we brought our coffe mugs and had breaks in between as we discussed our passion for water and hydrofeminist topics.



Image 9: Transcorporeality, Performance, Collab w /Anastasia Savinova, (Holmön Sweden 2021) https://vimeo.com/547517363

My most recent curatorial engagement is a Hydrofeminist group title Vattenkompisar in which we share and harness a dialogue on watery practices and approaches to watery thinking. Gathering artists that live in and about Stockholm. We had our first meeting at Malin Arnell's studio in Varvsarbetarhuset near Mälaren.

Harnessing collectivity and dialogue between practices is an important aspect of being an artist – shaping the social fabric with important issues and the creation of new concepts. For the future I want to continue to influence the field make research, do field-trips, create installations, write and harness curatorial and collective initiatives.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I look at the main aspects of my practice - linking it to broader theoretical themes. My research methods are set in relation to the art/craft field as well as eco-feministic theory in specific that of Rosi Braidotti's. I have presented *Metaplasm* as concept and base for my practical work and choices. I have reflected on the norm-critical perspective my project has in relations to my figurative role in the landscape as I link my identity as a woman to a universal field of different beings and genders in order to embody a wider understanding of my environment. Research, field-trips, collective initiative are fundamental aspects for my context-based practice. An attentiveness to place and the residual elements that exist in a particular location. I have brought up the recent collaborations I have done during my masters with artist Zoey Hart and curator Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris. The paper has allowed me to expand further into feminist theory, it has created a curious window into my practice and has left me hungry for reading and exploring the field more. I believe we must act towards a sustainable becoming and my art is a place in which such becoming is imagined.

The final works on display for the end of master exhibition will be a mix of found wood trunks, set-up as sculptural altars containing clay vessels and glass frames with photographic textiles. As well as a centre piece screening the film *Metaplasm*. There will be placed sand onto the floor reflecting Holmön as site. A ritualistic and choreographed feel will be felt as one walk in between the sculptures whilst the soundtrack of *Metaplasm* will be on low volume.

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Image Reference List

Image 1 Alvestad Lopez, Beatrice. *Metaplasm*, costume for performance, wax cotton, printed photograph, beads, pearls and residue, (Stockholm, 2021).

Image 2 Alvestad Lopez, Beatrice. (Ålvik, Bergen 2020)

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Image 8 Alvestad Lopez, Beatrice. *Lyttersken*, film 10:44 min performance, sound and text, Björkö residency (Stockholm Archipelago 2021)

Image 9 Alvestad Lopez, Beatrice. Transcorporeality, Performance, Collab w /Anastasia Savinova, (Holmön Sweden 2021)

APPENDIX

My full text published in MAI Feminism 2019:

By paying mindful attention to small details—such as the textures and colours of nature—I developed a connection with Gorvik (Iceland) during my daily walks, as if I were becoming a part of its soil. Fuelled by instinct, the photographs presented here came about as 'on-the-spot' and spontaneous interactions—the loving result of repetitive gestures, though seemingly mundane, became akin to ritualistic actions. These images are formed out of my desire to open up and fine-tune my consciousness with/to the spirit of the Icelandic landscape. In creating from local residue rather than acquiring new material, I have gained a sense of joy and purposefulness.

In his essay "The Rotation of Crops: A Venture in the Theory of Social Prudence", Søren Kierkegaard writes, "The more a person limits himself [sic], the more resourceful he [sic] becomes." Kierkegaard's invocation of resourcefulness gleaned from limitation resonates deeply with me as an artist. Moreover, his conviction that restrictions offer an opportunity to undo ourselves appears very relevant to our current pandemic. Following a slower pace while experiencing a pause on our journey through life might be just the right occasion to revise the meaning of our previous or normal connection to nature, perhaps even encourage a shift towards social and environmental healing.

What at first sparked 'Blue River', 'Worm Workings' and 'Presence' were tiny details and nuances in the landscape—the blue-tinted shell layered with the flowing water, the white shell contrasted by black sand and the yellow-coloured stone against darker grey stone. In drawing on distinctions, merging, repeating and placing these details into larger sculptural patterns, I attempted to initiate a dialogue of care and ritual for the land. The process relied on patience and perseverance, resulting in vulnerable and ephemeral works that break off material attachment to art as commodity.

These works are intended to entail more than sculptural form and photographs. They form an environmental statement to reconnect and unify with long lost ecological and ancient narratives. When I was creating them, on several occasions, seals would pop their heads up from the water to make eye contact. This sight convinced me that I was on the right path. Now, I believe it is the time to create rituals, be part of nature and restore balance. We must dare to be vulnerable as we are at a tipping point in history in which we sorely need truth, deep inward reflection and weighted collective actions. Most importantly, we must actively protect the land and its indigenous cultures. By way of conclusion, the words of E. O. Wilson in *Biophilia* seem apposite: 'To explore and affiliate with life is a deep and complicated process in mental development. Our existence depends on this prosperity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents.' 12

¹² Beatrice Alvestad Lopez, "Gorvik" in *MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture*, issue 6 (05 October 2020), https://maifeminism.com/gorvik/