

Detox



Clean

it

up!

A pre-study of
the contaminated
land in Rejmyre



Edited by
Hanna Lundborg
and Daniel Peltz

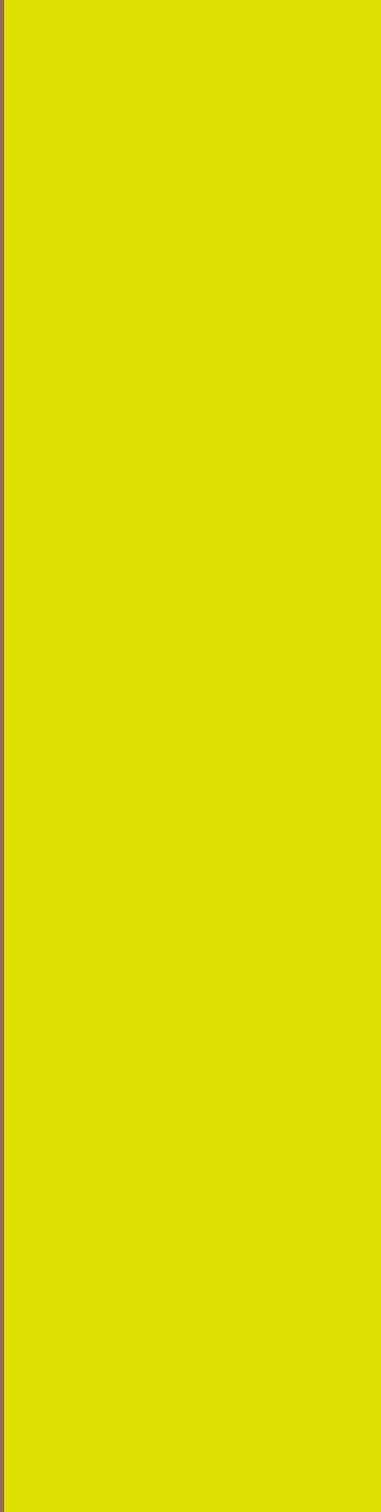
Rejmyre

Art

Lab's

Center
for
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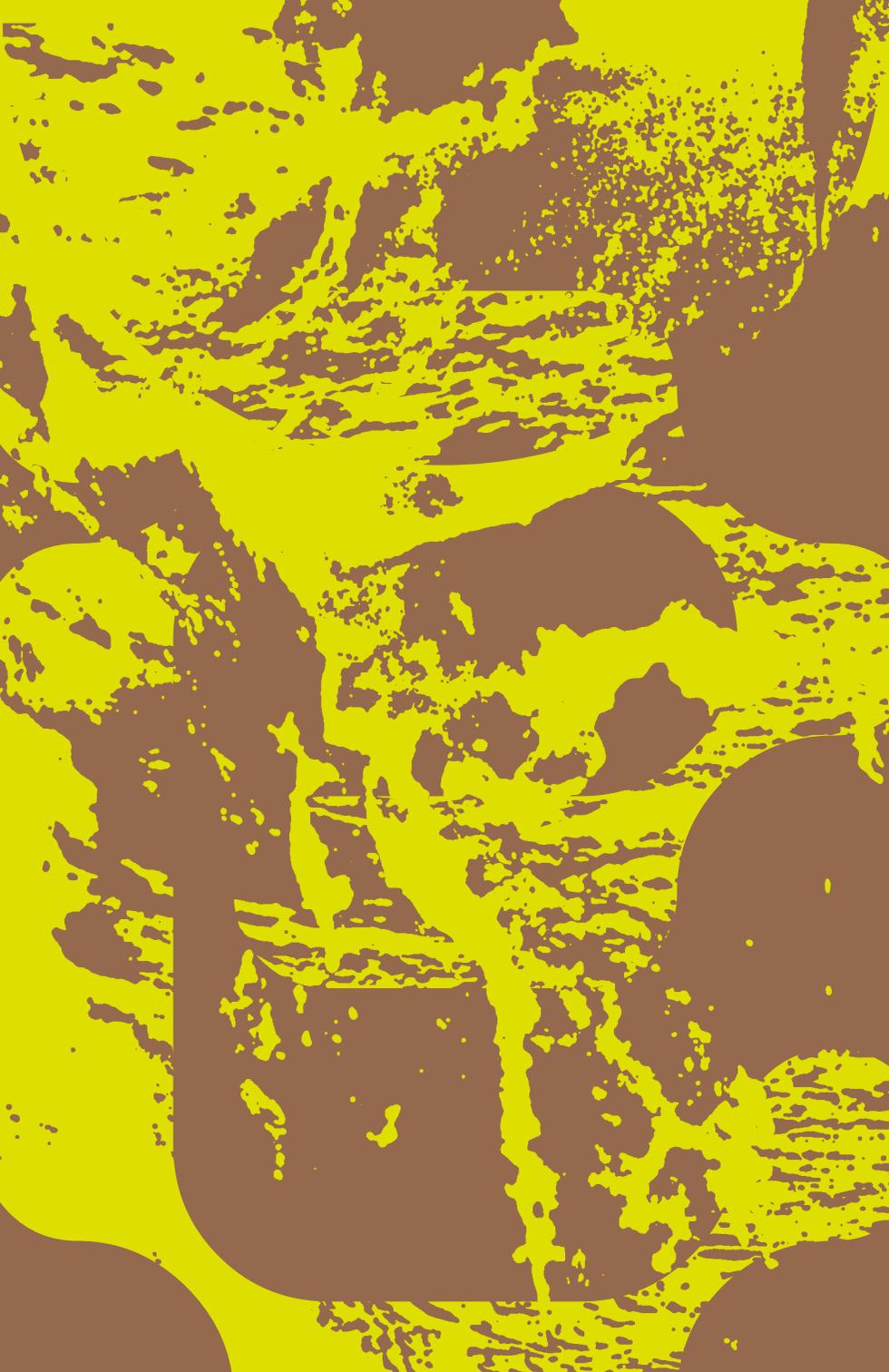
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7

Preface
Daniel Peltz

21

Towards Contamination
as Conspiracy
Taru Elfving

51

The Forbidden Garden
Cecilia Jonsson

67

The Lung of the Factory
Frida Hållander

81

Detox / Clean it up!
An interview with Daniel Peltz

117

Cadmium, Cobalt, Arsenic
Kerstin Ribers and
Sissi Westerberg

133

Refuging in Rejmyre
Daniel Peltz

159

The Psyche of the Land
Harrie Liveart

169

Additional
contributing artists

193

Contributors





Preface

PERIPHERAL

● Daniel Peltz ●

Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies Co-artistic
Director and Research Leader

7

REJMYRE ART LAB'S CENTER FOR PERIPHERAL STUDIES

Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies is a place of our own, where we come together with colleagues to think complexities and simplicities and to form micro-communities of intensive study. We refer to our work in Rejmyre as a long-term, place-based research in, of and with the rural, factory-town of Rejmyre, Sweden. We use the term *research*, in an attempt to reclaim this practice as the kind of primal study that it can be. Because we are artists, we conduct this study through our own artistic practices.

DETOX / CLEAN IT UP!

We work with an organic line of study, that unfolds from one strand of research to the next, so, to understand *Detox / Clean it up!* you need to take at least one step back, if not several. For three years prior to *Detox / Clean it up!*, we worked on a project in the Glass Factory in Rejmyre, *Performing Labor*, that was focused on thinking labor within the specific conditions of labor at play within this still active glass factory/craft village. At some point over the course of the *Performing Labor* research strand, our attention turned to the area behind the factory, roughly out of sight, where the waste was piled from the recent production. We gradually realized that this was a two-century-old practice of pushing the waste from the factory out the rear door. These two hundred years of pushing waste were the force that shaped what we had previously seen as 'the landscape'

behind the factory, a landscape that leads out to a stream, that flows quietly into the Hunn lake, the source of our drinking water.

It was also during the *Performing Labor* work that one of the many bankruptcies of the business of the factory was enacted. As no one was willing to buy the 'business of glass making' if they had to take responsibility for the 'business of the polluted land' that glass making had produced, these two entities (the business and the land) were constituted and separated. The local government stepped in and agreed to take on the business of the polluted land, in order to save the business of the factory, which was seen as important to the project of place-making and the local tourist economy. In this process the waste from two hundred years of glass production in Rejmyre became a public good.

This private waste (the uncared for remains of industrial production, aimed at extracting profits from a mix of materials and people, that contained a mix of bi-products of the effort to make glass more attractive) primarily heavy concentrations of arsenic and lead, was so expensive to take responsibility for that it broke the economic logics of extraction that underlie capitalist industries. We could not face the deep failure of these logics: the fact that, if we accounted for the waste, for the unseen destructive consequences of the capitalist endeavor, the whole project of the glass industry fell on its illogical face. The massive cost of cleaning up the waste would wipe out all the carefully extracted profits accumulated over the years. So, we did what we had to do to avoid



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a two-century-old
practice,**

**pushing waste
out the rear door.**

(p.8)

this realization and passed the costs and consequences on to the public, they became our shared inheritance.

What do you do when you receive an inheritance like this? Reasonable and responsible public figures stepped in and the regional council deemed the area a significant environmental hazard that needed to be ‘cleaned up’. Public money was allocated to the local government to study the problem, the site, the situation, and to ‘clean it up’.

Into this set of complications we enter, where we already were, as an artist-run, long-term, place-based research project based in Rejmyre with this situation underneath our feet. So the call comes to *Clean it up!* and we respond as an organization by embedding ourselves into the socio-political project of this public investigation, i.e. deciding how to take responsibility for this environmental problem. We approach our municipality, Finspångs Kommun, and ask to be installed as an official part of the working group that will commission studies of the waste site, determine the appropriate course of action and distribute the allocated funds. They agree to our proposal.

This method of embedded installation is important in understanding our approach to contextual art practice. Our work is embedded within the context of the municipality’s working group that is given public money and public responsibility for this waste. The working group that we were officially installed in is charged with studying this problem. They recognize that the problem is complex, and that the solution will be complex. When you embed artistic work and research within these institutional processes, there’s a chance for art to speak in less

familiar tongues and to have a different kind of import.

We make a claim for ourselves and the role of art and artists in this process by offering to commission a series of artist pre-studies of the site, to accompany the other pre-studies being conducted. The proposition of *Detox / Clean it up!* is to take seriously the local government’s desire to study this problem and to expand the scope of what is considered vital knowledge. If we want to understand this environmental problem, we see the value of a geologist’s and a soil scientist’s perspective as self-evident, we are working towards a world in which we include artists’ perspectives in this category of self-evident value. The act of taking responsibility for a problem like this is so complex, it cannot be reduced to simply a choice between conventional remediation methods. We sign a contract with the municipality stipulating that the artworks that we create will be presented, and considered equally, along with all the other material produced as part of studying the site and understanding what it might mean to take responsibility for this waste.

How to approach this artist study and what might we have to offer? First of all, it is important to recognize what we are not here to do. We are not here to play into the instrumentalized role that art is often cast in when it engages with multi-disciplinary public processes. We are here to bring the power of art as a vehicle (i.e. something that takes us somewhere, as opposed to an instrument that is used to do something or perform a desired function) for rethinking complexities and revealing often inconvenient aspects of seemingly known situations.



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**When you embed artistic
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kind of import. (p.12)**

This is one of the advantages of casting ourselves inside of a research process. Research processes, while often thickly institutionalized, remain committed to notions of autonomy from political forces and mandates. People may want research to tell them what they want to hear, what is convenient to their preferred ideological position, but they accept that it often will not, a right we are often less willing to accord to art in public discourse.

We invited over a dozen artist colleagues to join us in this work of exploring what it might mean to respond to the call Clean it up! We engaged these colleagues, in the way we often do at our site, through two ensemble residencies. This structure of the ensemble research residency is important as a mechanism to confront the deep ideologies of individualism that have colonized artistic practice and practitioners. When we come together, we study the site as a collective, through our varied practices. We invite each other into the ways we work, as we find our way through the site and the topic we have agreed to explore together. We also invite others to think with us, as we explore the site. In this case that included: soil scientists, geologists, archeologists, historians, glass workers and factory owners.

This publication assembles some of the critical results of our study of the contaminated site, in the form of a series of artworks. Each work presents its own set of questions and challenges to constituting the act of cleaning up, the definition of the waste itself and the task before us. We offer these pre-studies to accompany the other expert testimony as we grapple with this waste, our reluctantly shared inheritance.





Towards
Contamination
as
Conspiracy

2021

Taru Elfving Curator
and writer

21

“We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds – and new directions – may emerge. Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option.”¹

An old print pictures the village of Rejmyre, with the glass factory at its centre, enveloped by forests, cultivated fields and pasture for grazing animals of small scale subsistence farming.² According to this archival document, there appears to be no wasteland in the close-knit community, where the circulations between the land and all of its life forms seem closely entangled. While planetary forces have always been at play and global connections were already certainly present, the untraceable supply chains that haunt every aspect of contemporary existence were only in their infancy at the time. The codependent relations between all things – minerals, microbes, fungi, flora, fauna, humans – appear rather immediate and evident in this witness account from 150 years ago.

When did waste become a problem here then? Was it already discreetly effaced out of the historical picture discussed above? Or, let’s start from the question of when – and how and why – did the back of the factory become an irrelevant background, a sacrifice zone: When did time become linear rather than circular? When was small no longer a sustainable scale? When was diversity replaced by monoculture in the cultivation of relations to the land? The way industrialisation and extrac-

tion of natural resources lay the foundations for the Nordic welfare states is also a not-so-irrelevant background to this story. How come private property took over the commons, while waste has been deemed a public concern?

Today the land behind the glass factory is recognized as a polluted site, a danger to the health of the local inhabitants and the surrounding ecosystem. As the community is beginning to face up to the challenge of cleaning up the 200 year accumulation of industrial waste, Rejmyre Art Lab’s Center for Peripheral Studies has joined in the efforts with its project *Detox / Clean it up!* conceived and directed by the American/Swedish artist Daniel Peltz. These reflections arise out of the online seminar *Detox / Clean it up!* (3rd February 2021) and aim to draw together the key concerns discussed by the participants in the project.

“There cannot be such a thing as an irrelevant background in an ecological worldview”³

The contaminated site in Rejmyre can be seen in the context of a long history, where certain territories have been deemed as empty or worthless and thus available as *wastelands* or *lands to waste*. Or, these lands have been regarded as otherwise wasted according to the colonial ‘terra nullius’ principle, which in its progress narrative ignores relations to the land other than its own as inefficient, backward or simply non-existent. Yet the time has come to reckon with these legacies of

Everyone carries a  history of contamination;
 purity is not an option.
 (p.22)

Dirt is just  matter
 out of place... 
waste is culturally  and
historically specific. (p.26)

violence, extraction and destruction. Whatever has been dumped in the backyard or repressed in the back of the mind, is now flooding through all gates and boundaries.

Dirt is just matter out of place. As Mary Douglas argued, what is considered and treated as waste, is culturally and historically specific.⁴ Today, the waste of global capitalism and industrial modernity challenges both the order built on clearcut forests and the idea that we can draw distinctions between types of land. It has become increasingly impossible to contain its accumulation. Waste refuses to stay in its place or to go away, out of sight and out of mind. The unequally distributed effects of toxicity on peoples and ecosystems across the planet can no longer be ignored. The slippages between what is thought of as waste and what, on the other hand, is understood as wasted or wasteful are also signalling a system change currently in the making.

The problem is not so much, therefore, contamination in itself, but rather the ideal of self-containment and illusion of impermeable boundaries. Contamination is foundational for life, as Anna Tsing et al. argue: “entanglement with others makes life possible, but when one relationship goes awry, the repercussions ripple.”⁵ Toxicity is thus merely a symptom, while the causes behind the faltering relations are also in need of address.

How to even begin the work of cleaning it all up then? Detoxification is defined as removal of toxic substances from a living organism. In the human body this labor is mainly carried out by the liver. What are the livers of the land? And where to remove these sub-

stances, without simply transporting the problem elsewhere, for someone else to deal with? Or, perhaps the question to start with concerns the site of contamination. Toxicity is to be found not only in the land that is now fenced off, but also in the bodies of the factory workers and other residents in the area as well as in the bodies of water that flow through the more-than-human communities that make up the surrounding ecosystems. The labor of detoxification has to be carefully attentive to all of those affected.

“How to inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place”⁶

How to enter such a place – as an artist, with the task of a cleanup – with respectful recognition of the complex histories of entanglement affecting the ecological, social and individual bodies that together compose the site to be detoxified?

Frida Hållander proposes with her work in Rejmyre the possibility of sharing and carrying the responsibility of contamination with each piece of antique glassware, literally wrapped in the printed tissue paper that draws attention to the full cost of the glass production, including the workers’ labor and loss of health. The title of her work, “The Lung of the Factory”, speaks of the porosity of bodies and their vulnerability. Hållander also refers to the factory as the lung, a life support system, for the social body of the local community. Lungs and the act of breathing make tangible the codependency between

different forms of life and the irrefutable obligation of self-care to be also care for others.

If the lungs of the land are the plants, the waterways form its life sustaining arteries. As we breathe with and thanks to the plants, from microscopic phytoplankton to the tallest of trees, the waterways similarly affirm the impossibility of containment. Life is founded on, preserved and transformed by seepages and leakages. This applies also to the life cycles of waste, however extended they may be. As with plastics, the problem with glass is not only the long duration or lack of decomposition, but the fact that these materials are not self-contained units either. As Sissi Westerberg emphasises, plastic is comparable to glass as the waste of today. They both react with their surroundings, fragment and suffuse. Colours used in glass making are not solely stored as toxins in the environment, but they spread with the water that knows no borders, Westerberg notes when discussing the work of Erna E. Skúladóttir and Karin Blomgren, and Ulla Ridderberg in Rejmyre. Water always finds its way around barriers big and small, as it flows through all bodies whether deep under or high above the land.

“ghosts appear when the trouble they represent or symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view”⁷

The contaminated land may also be approached as haunted, with numerous unmapped streams between the past and the future, woven together in the present. The

threat appears intangible and uncontainable, ghostly. Haunting can be understood as a social phenomenon rather than a matter of individual psychosis or premodern superstition, as Avery Gordon suggests.⁸ To reckon with the ghosts of the contaminated land, it is necessary to address the cognitive dissonances experienced in people’s changing relationship with the place, with their labor and mode of life, their values and worth, when standard everyday practices are revealed as highly toxic. When a fence is erected around a site, where the previous generations used to play as children, this warning of an intangible danger shakes to the core both the personal and the collective sense of self.

How to relate to the different yet interwoven landscapes – ecological, social and mental – haunted by contamination? Or, how to address the psyche of the land, as Harrie Liveart enquires in their work? How does the repressed in contemporary Western culture enmesh with the troubles of the land here? For example, the refuse of the human body should surely be revalued for its own part in the circulation of nutrients in the ecosystem, rather than be wasted together with fresh water, another invaluable life sustaining resource. Wasteful refusals abound.

So, where to begin to unravel this mesh of a mess? How to listen to and give voice also to the land itself, as Harrie Liveart asks? Or, how do the diverse individual experiences within the local community add to the scientific or administrative views? To challenge the prioritisation of certain viewpoints over others, the artists in the Detox project set out to begin to tune into those perspec-



**Waste refuses
to stay in its place
or to go away.**

(p.26)

tives that may not be otherwise attended to in the process of detoxification. Experimentation with performative rituals and multisensory practices of research propose alternative ways of measuring, which take into account and bring into the conversation many senses of toxicity in their myriad embodied, collective and subjective dimensions.

Yet, how to make sensible that which does not otherwise register as sensory, embodied or psychic experience, but remains detached and abstracted, such as scientific data? The collective body of the artists in residence was mobilized, quite literally, as a sense-making tool in a research action proposed by Mattias Hofvendahl. Mapping the bounds of the intangible contamination the artists formed a momentary human chain alongside the fence in an attempt to form a relation to the ambiguous site. Hofvendahl also approached the data collected and produced on the toxicity of the land by sonifying it into a soundscape that is inaudible to humans yet made glass vibrate in his installation “Wetlands” (2019). No longer solely a holder of toxicity, glass itself became a resonant medium here between diverse effects of contamination.

“Plants are the world-makers we need to heed if we hope to grow liveable worlds. And our worlds will only be liveable worlds when people learn how to *conspire with the plants*.”⁹

Plants as expert mediators take the centre stage in the work of Cecilia Jonsson in Rejmyre. Plants are our lifelines – as conspirators in our mutual respiration, but also as channel-

ers of nutrients necessary for human wellbeing from the depths of the earth. This incorporation of plant and mineral life is a reminder of the intimate stakes in any mode of consumption. The porosity of embodied boundaries appears thus also a portal into various forms of knowledge. The plants carry out their remediation work, purifying the land, while also acting as sensors on the changing levels of toxins. As proposed by the long durée work by Jonsson, one day a smoothie blended of these plants will benefit rather than threaten the health of the drinker. Until then the fence around the plants will spell out the unresolved question of who actually needs protection from whom on this land.

Plants are our ancient teachers, Robin Wall Kimmerer writes drawing from both scientific knowledge and indigenous wisdom.¹⁰ The cleansing labor of plants emphasises the circulations foundational for ecosystems in all of their rhythmic variations. Some things simply cannot be speeded up, while no short-term solution of capsulation can be certain to hold for the extended durations of deep time. Whatever is buried will eventually resurface and return to the circulation. Erasure, or return to some idealised past state of purity, is not an option: Cleaning up would then merely result in an ultimately fascist gesture, rather than reckoning with the haunting as a potentially transformative way of knowing.¹¹

The waste should no longer be treated as refuse, to be refused, as Daniel Peltz argues in his work at Rejmyre. Cleaning up should not leave a void, but a refuge. Refuges are desperately needed as shelters and retreats

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(p.26)

for recuperation and renewal of the rich diversity today. As Haraway writes, “Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge”.¹² Peltz stresses the urgency to also actively practice refuging. Devalued places and bodies call for revaluation, instead of abandonment as waste of extraction. Maybe cleaning could be understood as gleaning – comparable to the practices of collecting left-over crops or cultivating fields that are regarded economically unprofitable to harvest. Cleaning up may thus never reach its end as such, but rather it retunes itself to the rhythms of circulation the cleaner is enmeshed within.

Cleaning as reciprocal care and maintenance has no time for human exceptionalism. Moreover, the notion of refuging calls for hospitality to be extended beyond the immediate neighbourhood and species-specific kinship structures. The webs of interrelations in the accelerated connectedness of the present expand beyond the reach of any available mapping, across both space and time. The practice of refuging has to build on the acknowledgment of the entwined fates of all of those discarded or displaced.

“Restoration is imperative for healing the earth, but reciprocity is imperative for long-lasting, successful restoration.”¹³

The land holds its own evidence of the last two hundred years of contamination in Rejmyre. Its testimonies on the myriad effects of living with toxicity provide insights that complement and complicate the views offered by

archival documents, official records and scientific studies. The sediments of waste that used to be unearthed as treasures by the children in Rejmyre, may now also be revalued as historical archives by archaeologists or as an ecological experiment in remediation as a collective more-than-human effort. Moreover, they offer a prism through which to reflect not only on the past but also on the present. A plurality of perspectives and knowledges is essential for the urgent task of restoring the relationships that not only impact upon but make the land and determine its future.

Rejmyre Art Lab’s Center for Peripheral Studies has presented a powerful case for the significance of art practices in the work of detoxification. The range of artistic approaches in the DeTox / Clean it up! project have brought to light the importance of navigating transversally the distinct yet interconnected ecological registers: the detox of the land has to be also a social and a mental detox.¹⁴ The practice of gathering together on site, around the shared matters of concern and care, has built on the strengths of artist residencies as a particular space-time with no strictly predefined coordinates of production. Rejmyre Art Lab’s commitment to collective “ensemble” residencies focused on embedded exploration and experimentation, breaks methodologically away from individualised models.

This emphasis on collective approaches fosters also collaborations between disciplines, opening towards “an ecology of practices”.¹⁵ Sensitivity to the site allows the contaminated land itself to act as a medium – a common

ground – between diverse modes of knowledge. In a small rural community, furthermore, both the specificity of the place and its resonances with planetary transformations can be drawn into focus. Here anyone with a serious commitment can have a stake and a say, the artists described their experience of working in Rejmyre.

“Experiments are not about discovery but about listening and translating the knowledge of others”, Wall Kimmerer writes.¹⁶ This echoes with the experimentality nurtured by Rejmyre Art Lab’s Center for Peripheral Studies as a platform for re-evaluating and rehearsing methodologies for cleaning up: creating refuges, sharing inheritances, reckoning with hauntings, tracing the impacts of everyday actions and taking responsibility, while letting the land restore itself and everyone in its multispecies community. Contamination may well then become conspiracy again.

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2. Gustaf Pabst, *Rejmyre Glasbruk (1874–79)*. Presented by Linda Hållander in the seminar DeTox.
3. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria (2015), “Ecological thinking, material spirituality and the poetics of infrastructure”, Bowker, G., Clarke, A., Timmermans, S., Balka, E. (eds.), *Boundary Objects and Beyond: Working with Leigh Star* (Cambridge MA & London: MIT Press, 2015).
4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).
5. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubandt (eds.), Introduction: Bodies Tumbled into Bodies”, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (Minneapolis & London: Minnesota University Press, 2017) M5.
6. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2016), 138.
7. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters. Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.
8. Gordon (2008), 7.
9. Natasha Myers, *How to Grow Liveable Worlds: Ten (not-so-easy) steps for life in the Planthropocene* (ABC Religion & Ethics, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/natasha-myers-how-to-grow-liveable-worlds:-ten-not-so-easy-step/11906548>, 7.1.2021).
10. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (London: Penguin Books, 2020).
11. Gordon (2008), 8.
12. Haraway (2016), 100.
13. Wall Kimmerer (2020), 336.
14. Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: Continuum, 2000).
15. Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices”. *Cultural Studies Review*, vol 11, no 1 (UTSePress, 2005).
16. Wall Kimmerer (2020), 158.





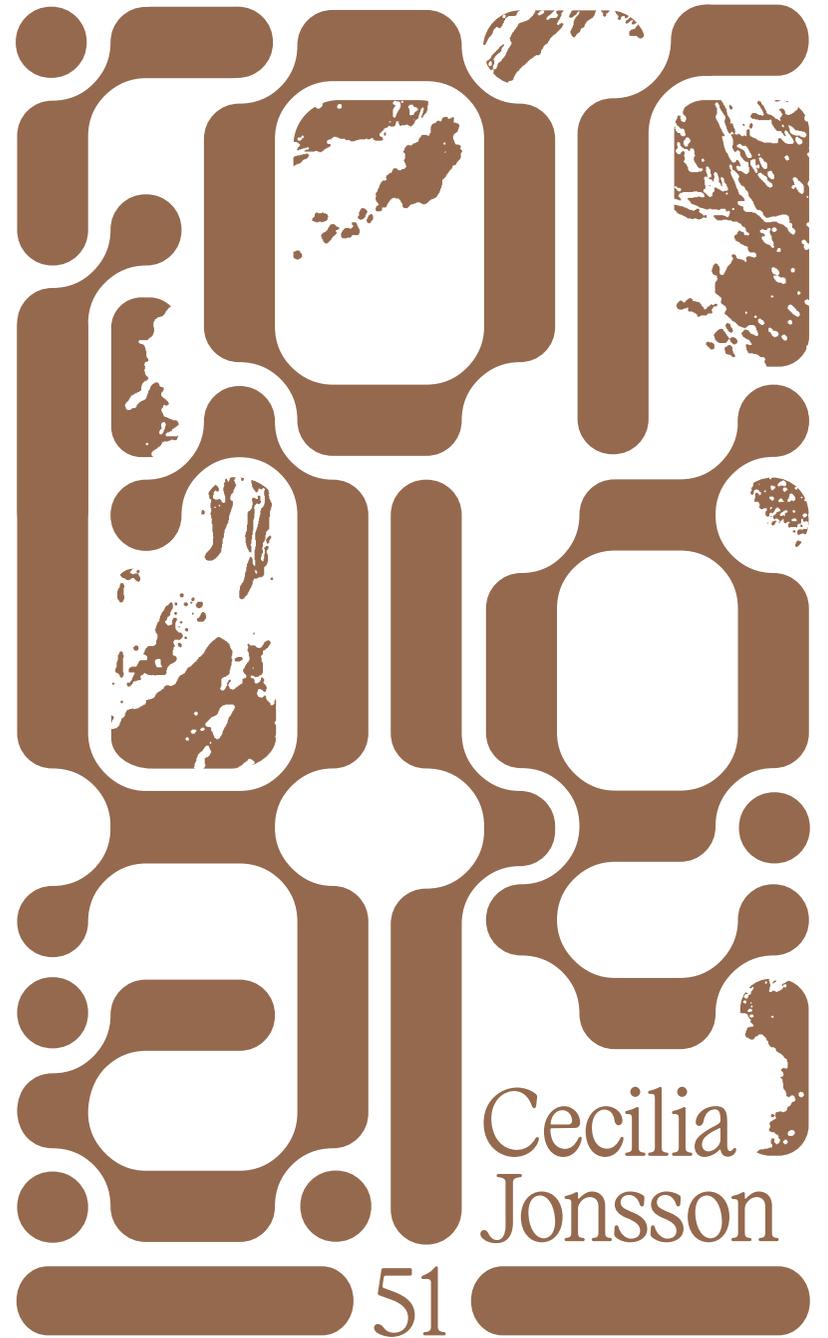








The Forbidden Garden



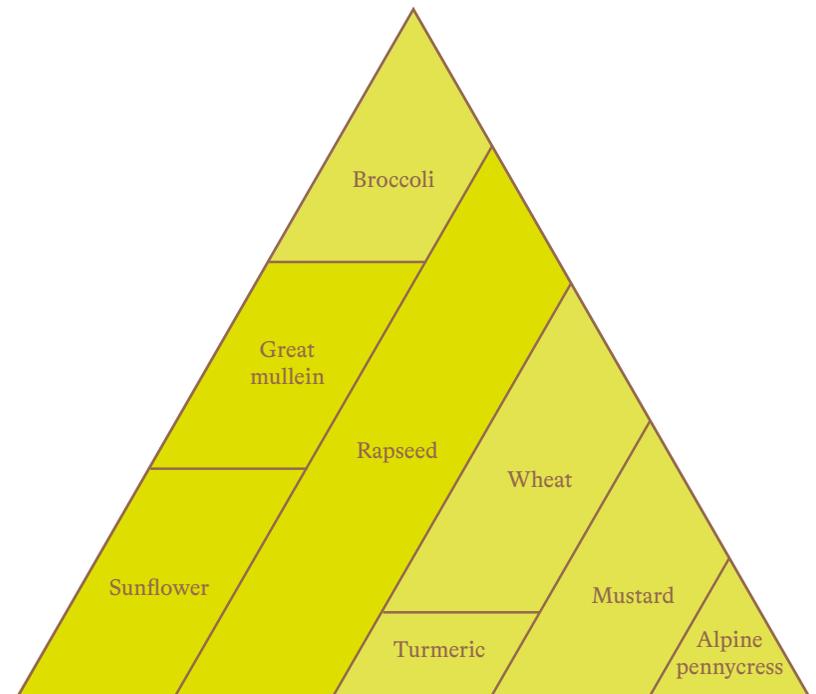
Cecilia
Jonsson



The Forbidden Garden is a site-specific art project devised in response to the risk assessment document in the preparatory clean-up study of the contaminated land adjacent to the Reijmyre Glassworks. The risk assessment shows the topsoil layer to contain a high content of several heavy metals, from the historical glass production, as well as industrial and household waste.

By comparing the most prominent toxins in the report to native, or naturalized, plants, that can be grown in the Scandinavian region, the project elaborates on the still relatively unknown process: phytoremediation that uses various types of plants to remove, stabilize and/or degrade contaminants in soil or water. The project utilizes known hyper-accumulating plants (used in scientific remediation methods), metal-tolerant species and food crops that, based on health risk reports, have shown to have high metal uptake.

In collaboration with a local growing group, nine different plant species were sourced to effectively extract different toxins from the soil. These plants were cultivated during the spring and summer of 2020 on a small allotment located on municipal land, a spot just outside the fenced and marked landfill area behind the factory (where the highest levels of contaminants are believed to be located).







By autumn, the plants were harvested and cleaned, some were hung to dry while others were conserved in brine and sealed in glass jars. Before this drying and conservation, a small sample of each of the plants was sent for metal scan analysis. These plants become ingredients for a “Detox Smoothie”, a speculative proposal into super greens and a quest – how many years does the garden need to be cultivated before this mixture may also be beneficial to drink?

The installation consists of artefacts from the process including plant material, photo-documentation and a printed copy of the scientific risk assessment document, presented as a juxtaposition, on a table that’s been divided with a metal fence in the middle, separating the information and its physical harvest.







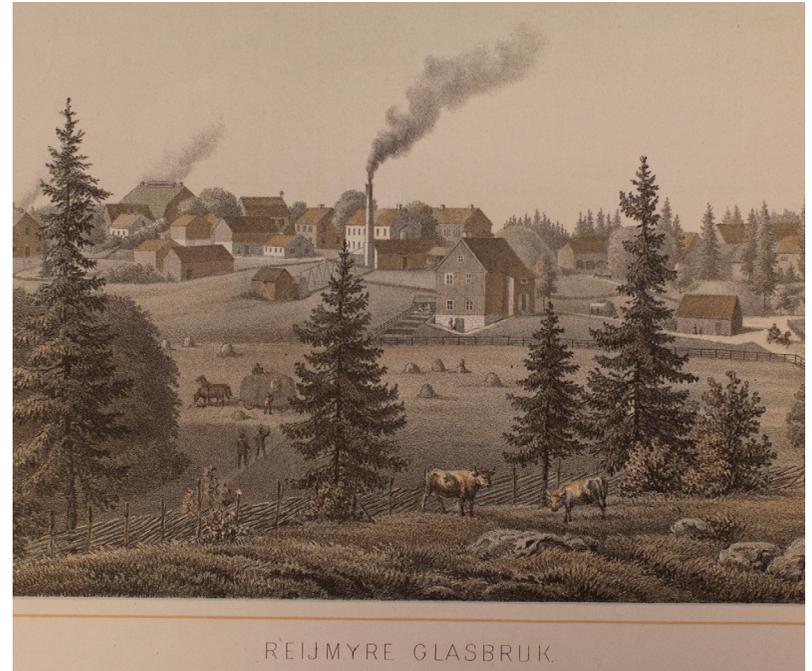
The Lung of the Factory



Frida
Hållander

In the spring of 2018, the artistic research project *DeTox / Clean it up!* called for an assembly with regards to questions and explorations related to Reijmyre Glasbruk's 200-years-old contaminated waste. My investigations started that summer and later got the title *The Lung of the Factory*. With the other participants in the assembly, I was examining the contaminated site through the lens of my artistic research practice – a practice that often starts as an examination that moves between the bookishness of libraries and historical trajectories on the one hand and making craft objects on the other.

At the site, I became engaged with the two hundred year history of producing objects at the Reijmyre Glasbruk and the piles of waste behind the factory created by the leftovers. I was interested in how the piles of waste were merged with and became the landscape. In the archive I found a colour lithographed illustration entitled: *Reijmyre Glasbruk. Sveriges industriella etablissementer [Reijmyre Glass Factory. Sweden's industrial facilities]*. The illustration was done by the artist Gustaf Pabst, between 1874–1879, and it's part of a series of illustrations that attempts to represent Sweden's production facilities. The illustration shows a speculative fiction, an imagined landscape: exceedingly pleasant – a landscape in the condition of a dreamy pleasure with cows, horses and carriages, fir-trees and where the factory chimney is in the center – as a lung. The landscape has changed a lot from when the lithograph was made in the late 1800s.





OPP

THE PRINCE OF JERMANIA'S VISIT TO SWEDEN 1870

FILLET ENGESTRÖM

Jungfru Isberg

Morsken Öns öland

PARADIS

Svenska
Kunsthistoriska
Museumet

I was captivated with all the historical layers of the contaminated landscape but also the different struggles that have been taking place there. Particular those of the ones that have spent their time in the factory – the workers. I turned to two books, the first one was *Rejmyre – utpost i Glasriket [Rejmyre – outstation in the Kingdom of Crystal]* from 1983, that was part of a study circle in the 1980's that had the objective of workers taking matters into their own hands, and telling their own stories.¹ The other book was from the local trade union in Rejmyre – *Svenska fabriksarbetareförbundet avdelning 376 Rejmyre [Swedish Factory Workers' Union, Section 376 Rejmyre]* from 1978.² The two books, depictions of the trajectories of the workers' struggles emerge not as singular, rather as a history writing that describes a series of several struggles.

I also related to my personal history, my grandfather worked part of his professional life at Limmared glass factory in southwestern Sweden, having previously worked in the textile industry. What I know of his work at the glass factory in Limmared is that he worked as a crack-off boy, removing finished pieces of hot glassware from the end of the gaffer's blow pipe and the mold by cracking them off. He died in 1982 from the lung disease emphysema, which was probably work-related. The reason might be due to his work with glassware, the dust from the textile industry, or other circumstances – it was never confirmed. Some years after he died, the scientific study: *Mortality in the Swedish glassworks industry* (1987) by Gun Wingren and Olav Axelson was published indicating that the concentration of

manganese,
but also
chromium,
nickel,
copper
and to a certain extent
lead
and arsenic,
was found among glassworkers.³

It showed that there was an increased risk for various cancer types and for cardiovascular deaths. The study also showed that, among glassworkers, there was more extreme exposure for those in the category of glassblower than for other glassworkers, due to the glassblower's direct oral

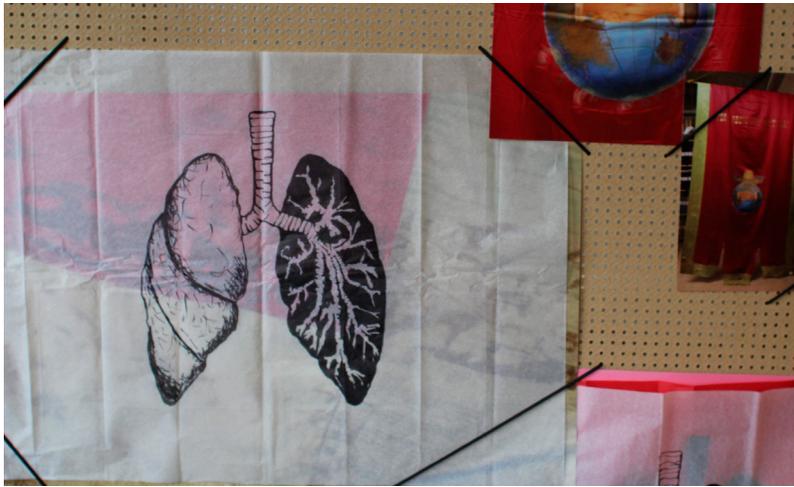
contact
with the working tool,
the pipe.⁴

Material substances remain
in bodies; in the lungs.

On site, the beautiful summer of 2018, the members of the historical society in Rejmyre recall the scientific study,

they remember how a
few working methods changed
after the study was published,
but not all.

After a time,
thing got back
to normal.





Productions have consequences for the human body – and for our common environment. As an understanding of the site behind the factory, I emphasize the lung. The lung as part of the human body – the working lung. But also, the factory as a lung in the “community body”, as a metaphor for how a society is set up – its economy, its welfare.

The factory’s contaminated site and private stories therefore reveal how several power measurements are interconnected and that the disposal of body and nature is linked.

I draw the two trajectories above listed on tissue paper. Through the fragility and vulnerability of the tissue paper. I wanted to reconnect to the material wrapped around each glass item for transport to consumers – which further refers to the hands that perform other work in the factory, the workers that worked as inspectors and packers of finished glass with tissue paper. The act of “taking care” of the finished glass, wrap it, pack it – the careful packing of the finished glassware, putting it in shipping barrels, was an act of concentration. On the tissue paper the contaminated site is depicted through stories of love and struggle.

In composing the imagery on tissue paper, I return to the *Svenska fabriksarbetareförbundet avdelning 376 – Rejmyre* [Swedish Factory Workers’ Union, Section 376 – Rejmyre]. Drawing from writings and archives, I call for a return to the struggle. I incorporate the image of an historical banner that was made in 1955 for the workers’ organization in Rejmyre founded in 1919. This banner sits today in an archive, wrapped in tissue paper to be kept for

the future.⁵ Later these prints on tissue paper, that merge all of these layers of history, are given to the owner of the antique shop in Rejmyre to be used as wrapping paper for his wares.

The banner and the tissue paper constitute a material that raises more questions than answers. However, the factory leaves behind contaminated land and contaminated bodies. We agree to public responsibility for the former but not the latter, revealing how the body and nature are linked, as industrial “disposal” sites, but is the responsibility for them shared equally?

1.

Rejmyre – utpost i Glasriket was part of 30 study circles called: *I Glasriket – människan, miljön, framtiden [In the Kingdom of Crystal, the people, the environments, the future]*, which took place between 1978 and 1983. The project was an initiative of ABF in Lessbo and Nybro, together with the local trade union (Svenska Fabriksarbetareförbundets divisioner 2, 44 and 122).

2.

Svenska fabriksarbetareförbundet avdelning 376 Rejmyre 60 år 1979, avdelningen, Rejmyre, 1979.

3.

Gun Wingren and Olav Axelson, *Mortality in the Swedish glassworks industry*, Scand J Work Environ Health 1987;13(5) p. 412 – 416. See also Gun Wingren, *Epidemiologic studies of health hazards related to the Swedish art glass industry*, Diss. Linköping: Univ., 1992, Linköping, 1991.

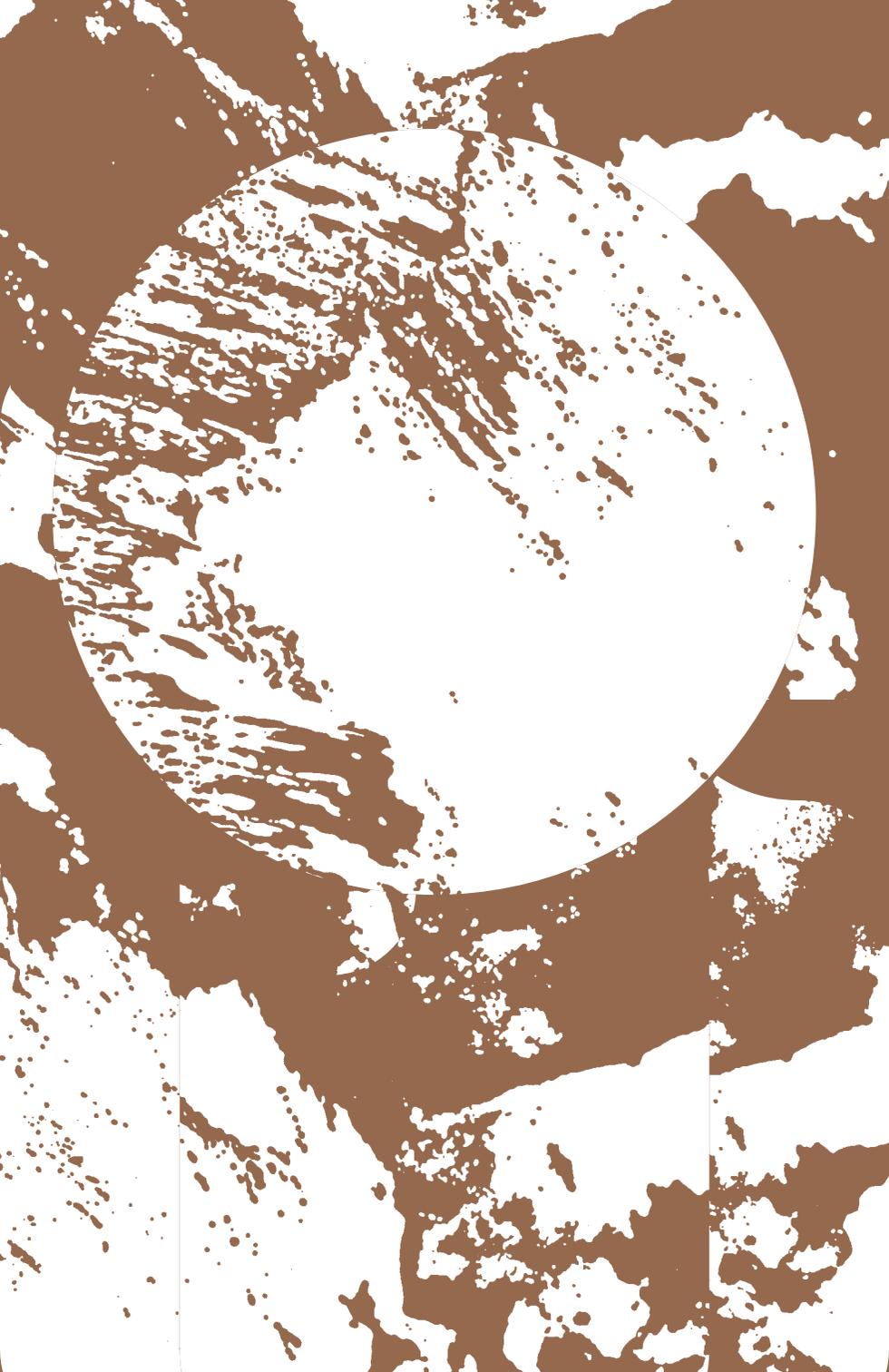
4.

Ibid.

5.

The banner Svenska fabriksarbetareförbundet avdelning 376 – Rejmyre is from 1955 and it is stored in the Norrköping society archive.





From Performing Labor to Detox / Clean it up!

to

an inter-
view with
Daniel Peltz
conducted
by Hanna
Lundborg

Refuging in Rejmyre

HL This interview and conversation follows the path through several different research strands that you have initiated as the research leader of Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies. I would therefore like to start with the notion of research within your work. How would you say you are deploying artistic research in the work you conduct at this site?

DP We refer to our work in Rejmyre as a long-term, place-based research. The research strands that we've taken up point to the subtle, indirect ways in which knowing emerges, not through a restricted conscious exploration. We're not only using our smart mind to find our way through this place. We're exploring on all fours, blind in the dark. One of the things that often happens when we institutionalize study or thought, is that we get more and more distant from these other modes and ways of knowing. The decolonization movement in higher education has rekindled an awareness of the violence that's committed in that distancing.

I was talking to some colleagues at the art academy recently about how a lot of our art students have been told at some point in their lives as students that they were *not good at studying*, and from this they got this idea that they were not smart in some way or perhaps even simply not good. It's interesting because we often think of art and its hierarchies, exclusivities and power structures, but the practice of art, in many ways, remains a marginalized form of knowledge.

All of this to say, the way we move through these different research strands in Rejmyre, is something that we're trying to keep a very gentle contact with, more than to steer or to direct.

HL When working with this type of vision *for* research or the notion of giving artistic research a place to own its own knowledge, would you say that this is a political act, a way to propose another position for art in society?

DP The notion of art is itself an abstraction. I'm not interested in a political project of advocacy for the value of an abstraction. I'm much more interested in exploring how we can work with and within these abstracted understandings of art. From that perspective, the question of whether art is or is not valuable becomes less important. Art has certain qualities, and as a result we can work with those qualities in different ways. It's accorded a rarified social status, it occupies and activates a space of imagined freedoms, it's intensely empowered and disempowered. It's power is perhaps that it can do anything, as long as it doesn't do anything. How can we work with those qualities?

There is, perhaps inadvertently, but very often, an instrumentalizing impulse that accompanies projects that involve artists in anything of consequence. I want to resist that intelligently, which is to say not always directly. If there's a political project in our work in Rejmyre it would be to resist this instrumentalizing impulse

and own the actual knowledges that are contained in our practices, with all of their messy, discordant, tangential, resistant, absent qualities, and to make a claim for this as arts knowing. If the soil must contain the resources a plant needs to grow, then abandoned places like ours in Rejmyre, wondering about what value they might have in a society that has deemed them refuse, represent rich soil for giving and taking refuge for these and other counter productive knowledges.

HL How do you work with artistic research as a mode of practice?

DP There's a conversation going on within academia about how art and artist knowledge functions within the context of other knowledge forms. I'm grappling with that question inside my practice. If the idea is that art practice, and those of us who practice it, can produce certain kinds of knowledge that are important to the thinking and understanding of various issues, then I'm invested in how we can do this thinking within the languages of our practices, without translation. I'm exploring forms for that, that are very specific in terms of what they ask us as artists to do in order to participate in research, for example.

I think one of the tensions that accumulated in the construction of research as a dominant mode, or a field of practice within art, is that research activated some of the same latent hierarchies present in the construction of the notion of study, where a lot of people feel they're not good at 'studying.' I recognize the same process hap-

pening within research, where a lot of artists begin by thinking they are not good at whatever this new 'research' regime is about or requires.

Within the *Performing Labor* project (conducted in Rejmyre 2015–2017), I wanted to experiment with creating a very specific role for artists to perform this act of research, in which the artists (myself included) conducted research through performing a task that we are already well trained to do, i.e. making something. We weren't asked then to articulate these things we made in some other way. We were asked to make something, with a very specific kind of exhibition context in mind, which was a conceptual product catalog that I had designed and also as a series of objects embedded within the existing collection of the historical museum. I then recast the role of analysis, outsourcing it into the hands of two specific accidental audiences. After making our product of and about labor, the artist role was done within the structure of this research. This structure is simultaneously an empowering and disempowering way of constituting the role of the artist researcher. The aim, however, was not to increase or decrease our power; the work is rooted in a kind of wondering about how knowledge is produced and a desire to make room for and explore marginalized states of knowing.

HL During all your years and work in Rejmyre you have been working with what you refer to as *embedded installation* of art works at different sites in the town of Rejmyre, as a way of finding

We're  not only using
 our smart mind 
to find  our way
 through this place.

We're  exploring
 on all fours, 
 blind 
in the dark.  (p.78)

new and previously unthought audiences, something you refer to as *accidental audiences*. When describing your research method I see links to the way you work with physical embedded artworks, can you describe this link further?

DP An embedded installation approach has been a core idea in our work in Rejmyre aimed at re-radicalizing the concept of site-dependent art. Rather than showing artworks in the gallery space or demarcated in public space as art, we have emphasized embedding site-dependent artworks into different local contexts (such as the pizzeria, the antique shop, the tourist information center or the glass factory) in an undifferentiated way. So you could come to Rejmyre and not see any ‘artworks’ but still experience a number of artworks embedded within your experience of the place.

This approach is important to understanding the conceptual construction of the *Detox / Clean it up!* project. We began the project by embedding our work within the socio-political process of deciding how to take responsibility for the polluted land produced by the historic production of the glass factory. I think of this as an extension of a strategy of *embedded installation*, where the project itself is embedded within the context of the municipalities working group, a body that is charged with and given public money to take responsibility for this waste. Rather than creating our own working group or commenting on the work of the working group and the problem of the pollution, in a form more common

to the fields of art, such as an exhibition or publication, we situated ourselves and our work inside the research, deliberation and decision making processes.

I’m particularly interested in experimenting with the roles that art and artists can play and how we can position ourselves and our practices as characters within these socio-cultural narratives. This is another way of understanding what embedded installation means to me, both within my practice and within the ways that I’m constructing frameworks for our organization.

HL In the project *Performing Labor*, which was conducted in collaboration with the Reijmyre glass factory in 2015–2017, you were working with artistic research in a specific way, as another form of socially embedded installation, by inviting artists into the project as artist *guest workers*. Can you describe how this project came about and what was important to you when thinking around and building this research mode?

DP When I began the *Performing Labor* project it had a set of critical parameters, which is how I tend to work when I create a structure that I invite other artists to inhabit along with me. In the case of *Performing Labor* that structure involved creating a new labor category within the Reijmyre Glass factory, for what I referred to as artist guest workers. The function of the project was to think labor inside the performance of labor itself, within

the very specific conditions in which labor was already being enacted in the factory.

This project was launched in 2015, but, in many ways, it dates back to my first observations of the factory in 2007, being drawn to the way that a very particular performance of labor was being enacted in the factory. The workers were performing an embodied craft practice of glassmaking, while simultaneously producing another kind of product, which we could refer to as the spectacle of their own labor. This was made clear by things such as the presence and activity of numerous tourist photographers and the guided tours of the factory floor, where a tour guide using a microphone and amplifier would narrate the scene of the production of glass.

I was interested in this dual consciousness that the workers were inhabiting inside the production of glass and the production of this spectacle of their own labor. When I'm interested in something like that, I try to develop an aesthetic structure that will place me inside of that situation, in order to experience something more of it on an embodied level. I've been experimenting with different ways of placing myself inside this situation from the very beginning of my time in Rejmyre, in *Performing Labor* this took the form of creating a new labor category in the factory for artist guest workers. How can we know something about, and explore, the conditions of labor at this site?

It was important to the project that the labor of those cast in the role of artist guest worker followed a set of parameters. The first was that we were official employees within the structure of the factory and were paid

approximately the same wage as the other workers. The second was that we would work the same hours as the other workers in the factory. The third was that we were subject to the same tourist conditions that the other labor was subject to, i.e. we were part of the tourist spectacle that was being produced there. Within those conditions, the task that I set, to all of the artist guest workers, was to produce a product of and about labor.

There was a kind of meta research component to this project, there was both a research of labor through labor, and the object that I chose to focus that research was the notion of a product of and about labor. Those products were further situated in a very specific way, within the context of the factory. The first was that they were all collected into the form of a product catalog. The product catalog was 'distributed' to the other factory workers by being inserted into the space of their break table, where many other product catalogs lay waiting to be engaged with, in the frequent short breaks between the physically demanding work of glassblowing. I was interested in, and have been in many projects, the idea of artworks being encountered outside of their recognition as an artwork, in what I refer to as the encounter between an accidental audience and an object of uncertain origin. I was further interested in this product catalog being situated on the workers' break table and thus in the relaxed, unproductive state of being on break, as a vehicle for creating a very specific kind of environment for the analysis of research outputs. I was interested in making a claim for this state of being on break as a valuable space of knowing and reflection.

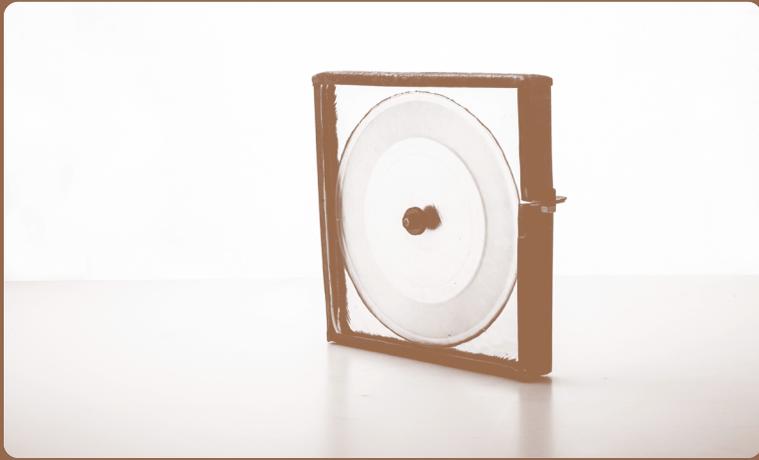
I'm interested in experimenting with the roles that artists can play and how we can position

ourselves and our practices as characters within these socio-cultural narratives. (p.85)



Usually, it would be the lead researchers who would perform the analysis of the data from a research study. In the case of the *Performing Labor* product line, this role was accorded to the glass workers, who already knew something about this labor that we were researching. They were cast in the role of research analysts through their encounter, in the space of being on break, with this specially designed product catalog, that they might or might not pick up from their break table. The second place the outcomes of this work were situated was inside the factory's historical museum. There I was interested in casting the visitors to the museum in this same role, as authorized research analysts, in the space of encountering the *Performing labor* product line embedded within the historical narrative presented by the historical society, who operate and curate the museum.

HL You are often in a dual role within the projects you do in Rejmyre since you are both the research leader of Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies and an artist with your own research at the site and within the projects. In *Performing Labor* you as an *artist guest worker*, made a product called *anything*. This product will, when explained further, lead us into the next research strand of the organisation, bridging to both *Detox / Clean it up!* and *Refuging in Rejmyre*. Can you tell us the story of the *anything*?



DP The image above is of the product that I produced, as an artist participant within the *Performing Labor* project, called *anything*. Its full title was *anything made to be lost and perhaps later found, perhaps in early spring, perhaps when the ice is still thick and clear*.

In my very first visit to Rejmyre in 2007, I encountered the image to the right from the historical society's collection. It is a still from a video they produced in 2000. The video depicts an event where a group of people assemble on the ice of the Hunn lake, outside of Rejmyre. They cut a hole in the ice and they dive into the hole, they pull out this object and along with it comes other objects. They then bring all those objects back to the historical museum (the glass museum in Rejmyre) and they create a display and an exhibit around these objects. The display includes the video of their dive that conveys a narrative of their expedition to retrieve these objects.

My piece, *anything*, was a response to the video that I encountered in the museum. I made this product and then situated it inside of the display case in the museum, where the other objects from the dive had been found. I then removed it from this case and went with a member of the Historical Society, on one of their small skiffs, to the site where they had found these objects on the earlier ice dive and I slipped this *anything* into the water, back into history.

The *anything* then sits there on the bottom of the Hunn lake until the lake freezes, at which point I go back out to the ice with the members of the Historical Society. We cut another hole in the ice and, along with a film crew and the regional media, we jump into the water, search for and eventually find the *anything*.





We bring it back up to the surface. Contained inside is this clear vinyl recording, that is an extract from a YouTube video, shot by a couple on their honeymoon in Myanmar. They spent their honeymoon by visiting a group of soon to be unemployed elephants from the teak logging industry. I took these honeymooners' tourist wedding video and extracted just the audio portion and inserted it into the *anything* object. Sitting on the surface of the frozen lake, I open the *anything* and play the audio recording it contains on a small portable record player. It releases the sounds it contains, of the elephants laboring in the teak forests of Myanmar, across the icy lake into the forest beyond. I was particularly interested in this gesture as a way of enacting a *pre-history*, for these soon-to-be-unemployed elephants, here in Rejmyre. This was a way of grappling with the complex socio-political act of refuging, which I was coming to understand as an important 'product' we were producing in Rejmyre. I was exploring a way of refuging by creating a pre-history

for the one who might one day come seeking refuge, such that, when they arrive, they would discover they were already there.

After the dive, the *anything* is acquired by the historical society and goes back into the display case with the other objects that were recovered from the dive. The video that we produced, *Seeking an anything from an uncertain time in the ruins of Rejmyre's future*, is added onto the video of the earlier dive that's on display in the museum. The new video becomes an addition, an addendum, to this historical narrative.

One thing that is important in this work is that there's no need for pretension. The long time-depth of my work in Rejmyre has taught me the importance of making a claim for the ways in which the work I make there is very much a part of the history of the factory. Everything that is produced in the factory is part of its history. The work doesn't claim to be part of any time other than the one it is part of. It just inserts itself into the historical narrative and lays claim to its rightful place within that narrative.

HL I would like to go back to the unemployed logging elephants from Myanmar, can you describe their connection to the rural society of Rejmyre and elaborate on why their pre-history and possible future is important to this site?

DP The elephants are important in a number of ways, as a vehicle for thinking the situation of the labor

conditions that I'd encountered in the factory many years ago, and to reflect on the labor transformations that Rejmyre as a factory is enacting. It's important that these are unemployed logging elephants. Another aspect of importance, something I discovered as I researched these elephants, was the curious relationship between the type of labor that they perform and their lifespan: 56 years in the wild, 52 years in logging, 26 years in tourism and 12 years in zoos.

The work with the *anything* came out of this question: how might we, as a community, use the situation of these elephants to practice the act of giving and taking refuge? What would it mean to bring a group of unemployed logging elephants to Rejmyre? What kinds of things and practices would we need in order to think *the act of refuging* with them?

As I grappled with these questions, I realized that one way to do this, to perform this *act of giving and taking refuge*, was through the act of building, through a conceptual performance of architecture. I was thinking about how the logics of building operate between urban places like Stockholm, that I was inhabiting at the time, and a rural factory town that has largely been left behind as a ruin, like Rejmyre.

In Stockholm, I had been invited to make an event in a structure called the Dome of Visions, that was a newly built, quite spectacular, temporary pavilion on the KTH campus. I was struck by the energy that went into creating this temporary building and how nobody seemed to be questioning the value of this site. It was seen

as inherently worthwhile to *vision* at this site, to create a Dome of Visions, even if this incredible expenditure of time and resources was for a structure that would stand for only two years.



I thought about what it would mean to pick this structure up and bring it to Rejmyre. What would happen to our understanding of the values that had made this structure totally reasonable and acceptable in an urban context, when we transported them to our site? Could we carry the value with us?

I invited the architect that designed the Dome of Visions, Kristoffer Tejlgaard, to come to Rejmyre and I proposed to him that we would develop a new dome of visions, in the form of a refuge for a group of unemployed logging elephants in Rejmyre.

The act of cleanup
became an attempt
to
explore and recognize

the things that were
always
not for export within
these systems. (p.106)

HL When working with the architectural proposal for a refuge in Rejmyre I understand the situation with the contaminated land became more apparent. How did this affect the work and the coming research strand of the organisation; *Detox / Clean it up!*

DP When Kristoffer and I started to develop the specifics of the refuge proposal, we discovered that the site where we situated the refuge, directly behind the factory, was part of a highly contaminated area. I encountered the toxicity, from the factory pushing its waste behind the factory building, in part through this desire to build on this land and the project *Detox / Clean it up!* grew out of that encounter.

Early on, it occurred to me that building on this contaminated land could be a way to engage the regional council in this project and also to fund the work itself. The local government had set aside somewhere along the lines of 30 million SEK to clean this site. Rather than accepting the often incredibly marginalized position of art within public projects, where setting aside 1% of a budget for art is considered an accomplishment, the proposition of this work was to allocate 99% of the budget for art. I wanted to approach the act of cleaning up as a large-scale, socio-poetic artwork focused on thinking the notion of refuge in relation to this site. This large-scale artwork attempts to contain the smaller project of physical environmental remediation, as just one element within its scope.

This strategy, of inverting the dominant logics of what is contained and what is container, in which art is typically presumed to be contained, became a way of talking to the regional politicians about value. It allowed me to say: we have this problem, that we inherited from industry, we're either going to spend a large amount of public funds dealing with this and wind up with a void, with nothing, or we spend the same amount of funds, but we wind up with a pretty spectacular something and in the process attempt a more far-reaching cleaning. Then there was the small project of convincing them that the specific something should be a 5000 sq. meter refuge for unemployed logging elephants from Myanmar.

The artists, myself included, that we invited to engage with us in the *Detox / Clean it up!* project, are given a similar position as within *Performing Labor*. We come to the site and are asked to make something of and about this situation, in the case of *Detox / Clean it up!* with the understanding that these things that we make will be part of the official governmental effort to clean this site up. The artworks that the artist group develops, of which the refuge is just one, are brought back to the working group in the municipality that is charged with taking responsibility for this contaminated site. They are presented as a pre-study of the site, along with all the other material that's produced as part of studying the site and as part of the effort to understand what it might be to take responsibility for this waste.

HL When describing Rejmyre you are often coming back to the logics of a factory town, valued through the act of extraction, both natural resources and human life and labor, and how a sense of worthlessness is growing over time when the town gets left behind as a capitalist ruin. The questions I hear you ask within this project is how to revalue the town, the people, the workers, through another set of logics. Not deploying the same capitalist logics in the revaluation process but to experiment with others. Can you talk a little bit more about this?

DP Company towns like ours in Rejmyre are helpful formulations in comprehending human life in a late capitalist world. Human civilization developed in sites that served the basic needs of human life. The project of the company town is different, the needs of industry and maximizing profit are primary and the support for the humans needed to make the company operate is secondary. As a result of this secondary status, the project of supporting human life is more defined. We can look at what a company built, for example, to support the human inhabitants of a company town, and we can understand something about how human life is being constituted. I don't know of any example of a company town that thought the needs of its human inhabitants beyond their conception of the lifetime of the factory itself. This leaves the human inhabitants of company towns with two options: leave the town and follow the flows of capital to

the next site of extraction or remain and renegotiate the value of the site and your value within it.

One of the core ways to understand the logic of company towns, but also in a broader way to understand the mechanisms of capitalism, is that they rely on logics of extraction: something is deemed more valuable in one place than where it is currently. This thing, or set of things, is extracted from that place until it's depleted and then the place is left behind, usually with some kind of void and some kind of accompanying waste. This has become an important way for me to consider the internal conditions of the people who inhabit these sites of extraction.

I've been using this notion of the capitalist ruin, that I'm borrowing from the anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, who writes eloquently about these ruins, ecological and economic, that are left behind, after the resources of a place have been extracted. She's thinking these ruins through the things that are still growing there, and I would include in that people. This is important to the way that I'm thinking *the act of refuging*. How do we cultivate these things that we are, that are still growing in these places that have been deemed capitalist ruins?

You can use the logics of capitalism and keep searching for something new to extract. First there was the forest that fueled the furnaces, and the need for workers to produce the glass products. As the capacity to extract value from these resources wanes, new sites of extraction are sought, commonly these include tourism. Here the connection to the elephants again becomes very strong.

As we think the act of refuging for and with them, this movement from one industry to another is critical, from the extraction of one kind of labor to the extraction of another. In the case of Rejmyre, the extraction of the physical industrial labor of glassmaking or, in the case of the elephants, the extraction of teak forestry labor. As the industrial value of both of these forms of labor waned, their value as spectacle was turned to as a new resource to extract; the elephants in the tourist wedding video and later in the tourist ride and the glassworkers in the narrated tours and the tourist photographs and videos made of their work.

One of the things I've been trying to think about, really since I first arrived in Rejmyre, so 14 years in the making, is what's at stake in that transformation of labor, and how might art allow us to accompany/inhabit that transformation. The question around refuging is, in that way, connected to broader questions of laboring bodies and their value at this moment in history.

HL Within the *Performing Labor* project you made a performance together with the performance studies scholar and theatre maker Ioana Jucan with the title *Not for Export*. This concept seems to flow into the work of *Refuging in Rejmyre* and the questions surrounding the company town. Can you elaborate on your thoughts around the importance of this notion?

DP My time in Rejmyre has been informed by the other projects that I've conducted while working and living here. The two years that I spent in Western Australia, from 2013–2015, working on a project in one of the largest open pit iron ore mining towns in the world, taught me something about Rejmyre and about my interests in this place. During that time, I was able to process the connection between these two very different factory towns, that were founded on logics of extraction and export and connected through the idea of the capitalist ruin. The understanding that human life within a company town, as a raw material that needs to be stored and maintained, is a critical component of the logic of these towns. They were placed where they are because of the proximity of a fuel source or a geological deposit, and then the human labor that was needed was imported to meet this less moveable material.

The company town needs to create a container for human life. Which is, on a larger level, akin to the role of a society or an ecosystem. In the form of the company town, you have a kind of microcosm of this process. It's a complicated one because it's driven by extractive logics. It's not a social project at its core, it's an economic project, and yet inside of this economic project there is forcibly a social project.

It occurred to me, over the years, how this function of the company town, needing to create a complete container for human life, that is a necessary raw material in its operations, is a really effective way of reflecting on our position as humans within global capitalism.

Global capitalism is also a kind of system that has a secondary need for human lives. It creates a container for human life that is more or less inhabitable, yet we have few choices other than to inhabit it.

I started to realize how the *act of cleaning up* is linked to this idea of *what is not for export*. How can we clean it up, or recover or resuscitate our value, through a recognition of the things that were always not for export within sites built on extractive logics? The act of cleanup became an attempt to explore and recognize the things that were always not for export, within these systems.

HL In 2015, when your work with the *Performing Labor* project started, your concerns around the company town as a container for human life overlapped with one of the larger refugee waves in Sweden that affected many small rural communities just like Rejmyre. Can you describe how this influenced your work and your thoughts around the project?

DP When developing the *anything* product and the refuge for the elephants, the work started to overlap with another set of concerns I've been grappling with at the site, around the way in which towns like ours in Rejmyre had been drawn on, by national and regional governmental forces, as sites to temporarily house newly arrived people from different parts of the world. What was really curious to me, in that move, was the way in which towns like ours were deemed valuable mainly because they were valueless.

It was the accessibility of our cheap housing that made us temporarily valuable. I was really interested in how we could appropriate that claim that we were valuable, to use it, to take it seriously. Basically say: you've decided that we're valuable, let's assume that you thought that through and that it is a serious proposition. If we are valuable as a site for refuging, then we have now developed a capacity, over these several years that we served as a temporary refuge, a capacity at refuging.

These towns were chosen because they were cheap real estate, but they were chosen to perform a very important societal function. A pretty intense one, for everyone, to have to flee your home and your homeland and to arrive and to be placed in these very small rural communities, that were themselves struggling to understand their value in the present and future. So when you enter a community like Rejmyre, you have to renegotiate your value completely, and then you find yourself in a community where everyone is struggling with their own value, and the value of the place itself. The work grew out of this desire to think this *practice of refuging*, and to explore how we might actually do it.

One story that circulated in the Swedish media at the time of one of the so-called refugee crises concerned a small rural community called Limesforsen. A group of newly arrived people were brought to Limesforsen on a bus. Upon arrival, half of them refused to get off. They arrived at their new refuge, and half of the people refused the site as a refuge. I thought it was a really important moment in which the constitution of refuge was directly

questioned. I'm interested in what happened, through that act of refusal, to all the people who live in the town. Was everyone who had a home in Limedsforsen suddenly, in some vital way, recast in this role of the refugee? Could Limedsforsen serve as a refuge for anyone?

It was a national media event, and people were drawn to it for many reasons I suspect. I realized what I was drawn to was the agency that was claimed, and the way in which that action was deeply aesthetic. Because it redefined the agency of the actor cast in the role of refugee and their right to negotiate the meaning of refuge. Their role had been very much circumscribed, by ostensibly well-meaning Swedish politicians who were trying to figure out what to do for the refugees. They need somewhere to be, find somewhere for them to be, find them a home. This situation evokes similar questions to those of the company town, the project of making a company town. What do we need when starting a glass factory? We need somewhere for people to be, to find them a home. But what kind of agency do they have to respond to this container for human life and what kind of aesthetic gesture might it take to transform the ways this agency has historically been constituted?

HL For my last question, a question I know you've been asked many times before, *Why Rejmyre?* Would you say that the opportunity to rethink the value of a place is better in a ruin than somewhere where there has been less of a storied history of rise and fall?

DP Are there some places which have not been thought through extractive logics? Certainly there are places that have been thought that way in less organized or recognized ways. Is it more possible to refuge in a space like that or is there something about Rejmyre being thought through these extractive logics that makes it more possible to refuge here? I do think this history of valuation, extraction and depletion, coupled with the continued, mostly unsuccessful, attempts to find new sources of value to extract, gives Rejmyre a strong foundation for this work of refuging.

What are the embodied ways of knowing that have been cultivated in the process of this extractive history; ways of knowing that can be redirected, appropriated and subverted? What are the gestures of soiling that have been performed in Rejmyre, that can now be appropriated in order to perform the act of cleaning up?

Craft practice becomes really important as one of these embodied ways of knowing. People have learned ways of knowing through repeated gestures, through working in groups with an intense awareness of molten material and each other. This awareness is conditioned by the material of hot glass production and has a logic that exists outside of the extractive logics that drove the creation of Rejmyre. It wasn't the needs of capital that created the heat of the molten glass, but it was part of what conditioned people's relationship to each other in this place. When handling molten material in an industrial setting with hundreds of workers, you need to be quite careful and aware of other bodies around you at an

unusual social scale. You also need to repeatedly collaborate physically in order to perform certain gestures. The idea of refuging, through this act of collectively building this refuge for unemployed logging elephants, is built on an attempt to redirect or appropriate some of these ways of knowing that exist because of the conditions of this site, not despite them.

I think this question also helps me understand how the project came to be and I think it's a fundamental question that you're asking. The current answer to the question, within this project and maybe for the future of the organisation, *Why Rejmyre?* might have shifted from the previous answer of it being *as good a place as any* to it becoming, in a particular way, *a better place*. For the purposes of refuging, Rejmyre is a better place than many.





Cadmium, Cobalt, Arsenic



Kerstin Ribers 
and Sissi Westerberg

This work consists of disposable plastic glasses that have been colored with textile dyes in different shades of red, blue and green. These are the three most popular colors in the historical production of the Reijmyre glassworks and they are on prominent display in the glass cases of the Reijmyre Glass Museum. To produce these colors, cadmium, cobalt and arsenic were used in the glass making process. These three materials now figure prominently amongst the pollutants in the landfill behind the factory.

Small toxic glass particles, produced by the cold-working (grinding) stage of glass production, were picked up by the water used to cool the grinding stones and flushed out into the land behind the factory. At the height of Reijmyre Glasbruk's production, there were hundreds of employees engaged in this grinding activity, a constant flow of wastewater mixed with particle pollutants flowed from the factory. There is now a concern that these particles will filter down, over time, into the wetland below the landfill and from there make their way into nearby waterways.

Throughout history, color has been used by humans to elevate and beautify objects and buildings. It has also been used to mark status. Pigment was precious. The old gray timbered cottages, which nowadays may seem more picturesque than the red-painted houses, were not left unpainted because they were thought to be nicer that way. People simply could not afford to "color" them.

Nowadays, we think we can afford to use both paints and pigments without restriction, without seeing their true value. Plastic is known to be one of these undervalued

materials. In the same way that small particles of glass seep out of the landfill and are carried into the waterways, small, microplastic particles are now spreading everywhere in our environment. Recent studies by the University of Manchester, as just one example, analyzed samples from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea, near Italy, and found up to 1.9 million plastic pieces per square meter.¹

The discarded plastic glasses used in this installation have been processed, through dyeing, and repositioned. We are interested in re-valuing them by positioning them in relation to Reijmyre Glasbruk's traditional hand-made glass products. This was done first by installing the colored plastic glasses inside display cases in the Reijmyre Glass Museum and again, in a later wall-based installation, in Reijmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies' gallery adjacent to the museum.

1.
High microplastic concentration found on ocean floor,
Jonathan Amos, BBC Science, Published 1 May 2020.















Refuging in Rejmyre



Daniel Peltz

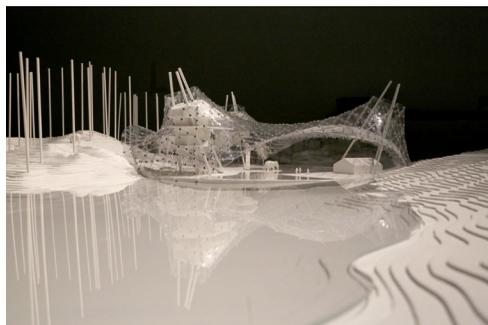
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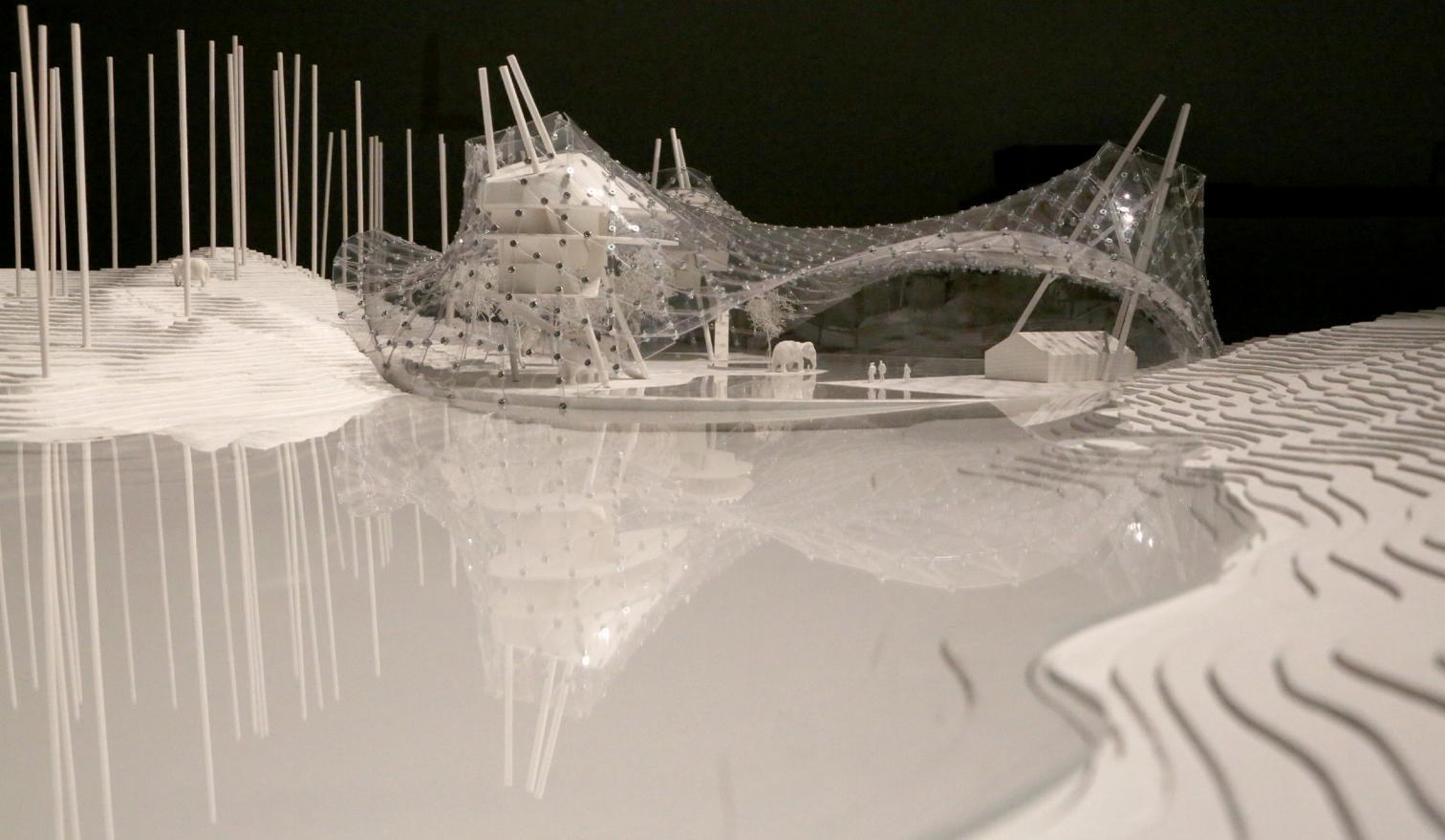
I've been coming to Rejmyre since 2007, when I was invited to join an art project in the glass factory that Sissi Westerberg organized along with a colleague. It was my first visit to Sweden and my first break, in a long time, from my substantial teaching duties in the U.S. Sweden occupied a particular space in my unreformed imagination, as something of a refuge from the pressures and inequalities of American capitalism. When Sissi and I formed *Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies* in 2009, we made a commitment that we would continue to work as participating artists within the frameworks we created for our peers. This was an important way of thinking about the *sustainability* of the project. We wanted to create a space, for ourselves and others, of collective and individual making and thinking, inside of a long-term commitment to a site. This commitment to being both organizers and participating artists inside of a long-term, place-based research project, means that my

own contribution to the *Detox / Clean it up!* project is not always easy to cleanly separate from our past thematic engagements.

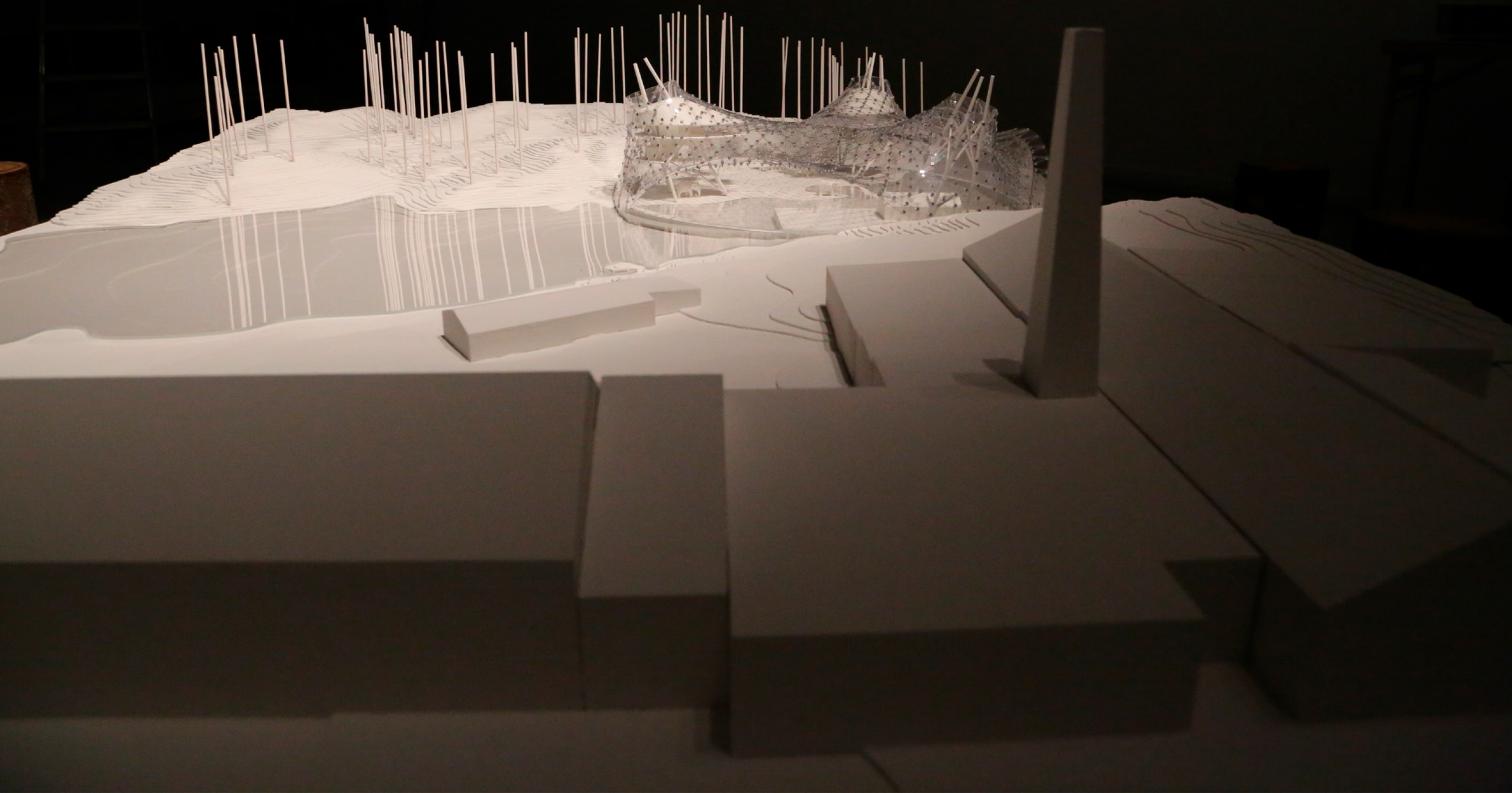
I've been working within the *Detox / Clean it up!* project on a work called *Refuging in Rejmyre*, that is a continuation of an investigation that grew out of our previous research strand *Performing Labor*. *Refuging in Rejmyre* attempts to reconsider the value of the town of Rejmyre and those who inhabit it, according to logics other than the extractive economic ones that underlie factory towns like ours.

Rejmyre can be seen as a ruin, made by capitalism's exploitation and abandonment of asset fields, in the language of the anthropologist Anna L. Tsing. The assets to be extracted have changed over the years (trees, quartz, glass, the idea of craft as a tourist spectacle) but the cycle of extraction, depletion and abandonment have not. And it is this cycle that connects us in Rejmyre to many other places and peoples.





What to do when a place has
been abandoned by the
logics of extraction?



How to be *in* a place that
has been abandoned
by these logics?

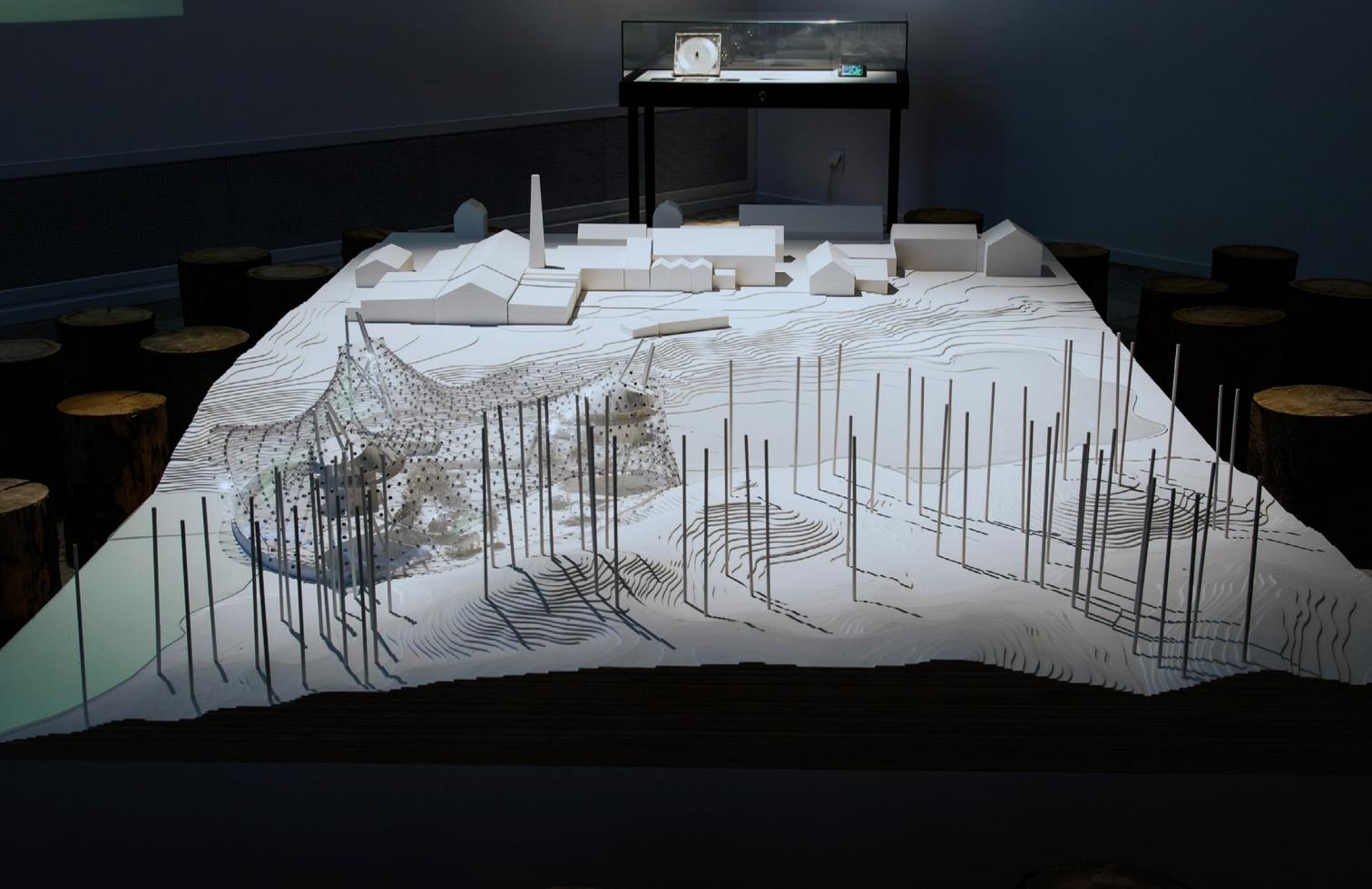
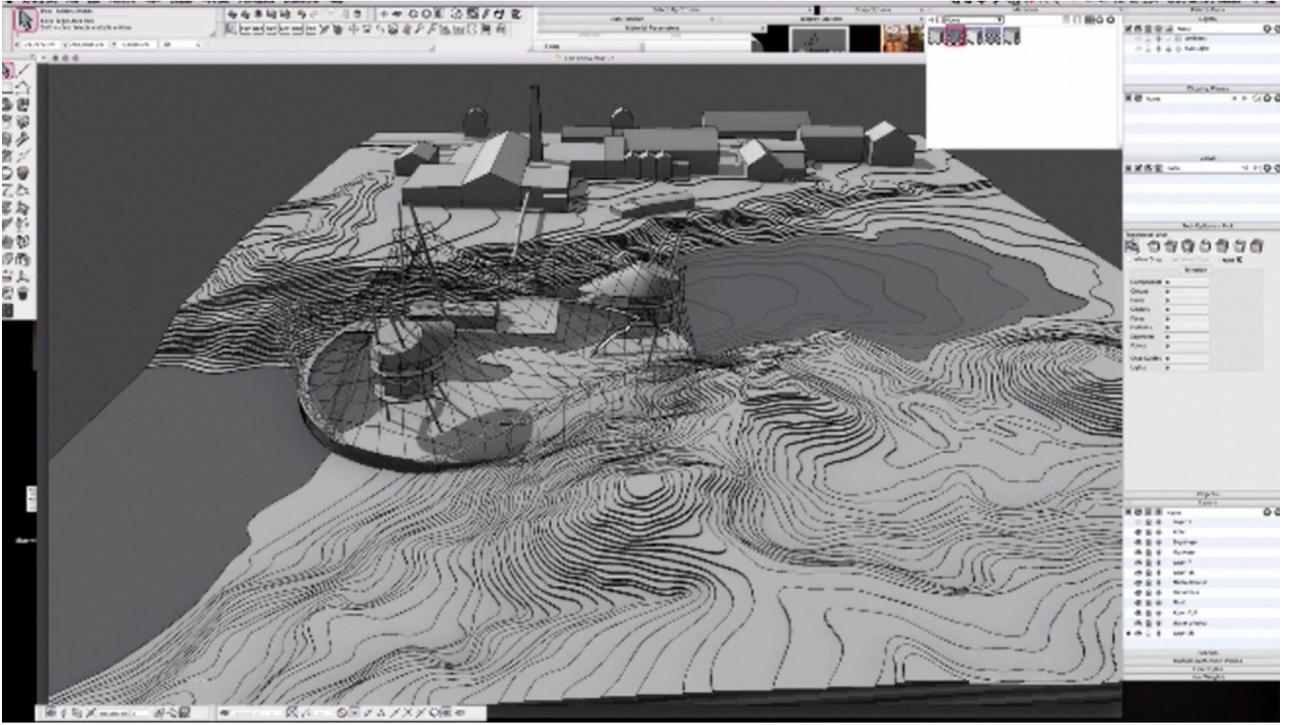
How to be *a* place
that has been abandoned
by these logics?

Anna L. Tsing proposes that we study in these abandoned asset fields because there are still things growing in these places. We are amongst those still growing things.

One way of understanding my work in *Detox / Clean it up!* is as an attempt to consider the problem of industrial waste contamination from the perspective of the social; how do we, as a community, clean our abandoned, soiled selves and the ground beneath our feet? How do we find the value of the place where we are living, and ourselves within that place, when both of these things have been systematically devalued? What role can art play in this process? It seemed important to begin by understanding that this is a large task that will require a large effort.

My work engages these questions of valuation and revaluation through a proposal to construct a refuge in Rejmyre for a small group of unemployed elephants previously employed in the teak harvesting

industry in Myanmar. The architectural proposal for this refuge was developed with the Danish architect Kristoffer Tejlgaard. I first encountered Kristoffer's architecture while working as a visiting professor at Stockholm University of the Arts. I was invited to make an event inside of a pavilion he had built there, outside the KTH campus, called the *Dome of Visions*. The dome project connected two urban centers of global capital, Stockholm and Copenhagen, in an effort to create a platform for envisioning futures. As I approached the spectacular geodesic building, I was drawn to the logics that made this elaborate structure, built to stand on the site for just two years, thoroughly acceptable, reasonable even, in this thriving urban/academic context. I wondered how the meaning of this structure would change if we were to move it to Rejmyre, to transpose these futurist logics onto our site, with its much more questionable relationship to the future.



HOW DOES A FACTORY TOWN
THAT PRODUCES GLASS
BECOME A FACTORY TOWN
THAT PRODUCES REFUGE?



I began a long dialog with Kristoffer, that took place over the course of several visits to Rejmyre, and resulted in a proposal for a 5000 square meter tensile structure, to be built by the community in Rejmyre. The structure was designed in consultation with an expert on elephant habitats to meet some of the needs of this small group of unemployed logging elephants from Myanmar. It is built on top of the waste site and positions itself as a complete solution to the problem of the waste, incorporating a dam that filters the water before it gets downstream into the refuge and eventually into the source of our drinking water. Instead of 1% for art, you could say this proposal makes a claim for 99% for art. The suggestion is that the municipality allocate the entirety of the clean up budget to building this refuge, or rather to enabling the community to build this refuge together.

Building together is an important component of the work, it is experimenting with refuge from the

perspective of buddhist philosophy, not as a place but as a set of actions. I am attempting to develop a *practice of refuging*. The refuge in Rejmyre is thus not a physical structure, it is an inversion of the principles of architecture (in which normally a building's existence is justified by its *program*, i.e. what it will be used for). Inside this project, the program or the purpose of this building is for it to be built, by the community, as an act of refuging. It is inside this act of building anew, an intentionally unnecessary and financially out of scale structure, that we might experience an undoing of this systematic devaluation caused by the cycle of extraction, depletion and abandonment. Building a refuge in Rejmyre requires a big expenditure of resources but the scale of this expenditure pales in comparison to the accumulated expenditures of extraction. It strikes me as oddly a thoroughly *appropriate* use of public funds, far more so than paving the site, to invest in the possibility of revaluing



life and lives in this place. If we are going to use public money to perform this act of *cleaning it up*, it should be the damage done to the publics that inhabit this asset field that we attempt to *clean up*. We should be left with something more than a void, a hole in the ground, or a parking lot.

The project began during the *Performing Labor* project, as an attempt to embed these elephants from Myanmar into the history of our site in Rejmyre. It occurred to me that one way to practice this *refuging* that I was seeking, would be to create a *pre-history* for the one who is seeking refuge. Such that when they arrived, at this site, offering itself as a refuge, they would discover that they had already been there. It is a kind of temporal twisting that is important to me in thinking the act of refuging and its received temporal logics.

While working on creating this pre-history for the elephants as a way of practicing refuging, I was grappling with a major transformation to the commu-

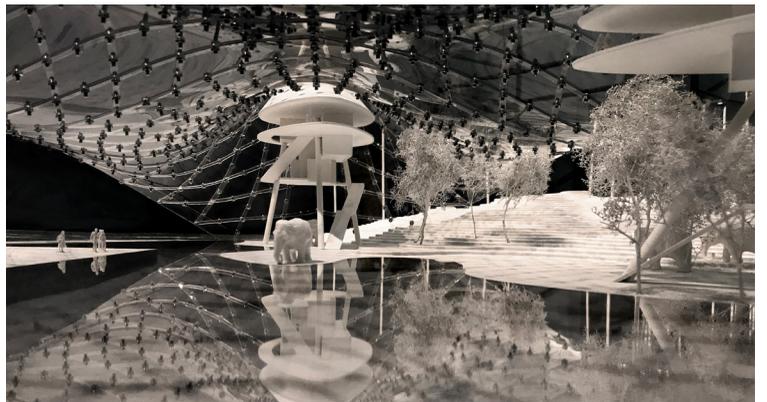
nity in Rejmyre. During one of the waves of refugees arriving in Sweden, the government turned to our town, rich with cheap housing, and deemed us temporarily valuable again; valuable for the purpose of refuging. Housing was adapted to accommodate a group of unaccompanied young people, who came to live in Rejmyre, while more desirable housing was built for them in nearby cities. My work takes this re-valuation of those who inhabit our site on its word. I operate on the assumption that those who made the choice, to make Rejmyre a refuge, had thought it through, and that it was not based on the extraction and abandonment logics that preceded the thinking of this place. We were deemed valuable as a place to practice refuging. I am carrying on that work, in good faith. It seems entirely possible that we are a valuable site, to further develop this practice. Perhaps, precisely because we are ourselves in need of refuge from this history of extraction, depletion and abandonment.



What is the connection
between the
elephants and Rejmyre?

First, it is important to understand that these are unemployed elephants. They were broken into service in an industry of extraction that used them up, so they are a kind of ruin left to navigate the vagaries of their own value. They are also facing a difficult situation, as one of the primary employment options for them is in the tourist industry, similar in this way to the options available to glass workers in wealthy countries where industrial labor has mostly been outsourced to cheaper bodies. Unfortunately, studies have shown that elephants employed in the logging industry live approximately the same life span as those in the wild, 52 years, whereas elephants in the tourism industry live only 26 years; half a life lost in shifting labor conditions. Elephants in zoos in comparison live approximately 12 years, another half a life lost. I was drawn to the challenging, if not impossible, situation of these unemployed animals, as a vehicle, not to carry tourists, but to

allow us to think, imagine and practice the challenging if not impossible act of refuging in Rejmyre.



How do we,
as a community,
clean our abandoned,
soiled selves

and the ground
beneath our feet?

(p.136)



The Psyche of the Land



Harrie Liveart

159

It was a hot and sweltering day. We were standing behind the glass factory looking at the hillside slanting towards the lake. In the trees, birds were singing and small tortoiseshell butterflies were flying over patches of grass. It all looked so peaceful. But barbed wire and warning signs kept us from entering. This was the waste site.

That physical barrier became psychological and it hindered us from grasping how it had formed in the first place. We are raised in a society which warns us of danger and we take that for granted. Through our eyes the past seemed irresponsible. So, we decided to interview two locals about their childhood memories around the glass factory. With the help of their stories we hoped to ‘jump the fence,’ and enter an understanding of how the society worked back then.

They told us that they often played on the site behind the factory. It was an exciting place, a treasure chest. The best was to find long glass pipes which seemed to have been made for shooting peas. The locals said that they didn’t know, no one talked about it, the fact that the land was becoming polluted because of the waste dumped there.

After the interview we both had sunk deep in thought as we drove back from Rejmyre to Kalbo. The sun was shining from a clear blue sky surrounding us in warm tones. The air rippled above the asphalt. The mind was still. The sunlight sparked a cinematic moment as from a road trip movie. The environment seemed familiar yet surreal. There was something peculiar in the landscape... Something that wasn’t quite right...

Suddenly I realised what it was:

Look, at that tree the leaves are yellow, as if the autumn had started!

When we drove closer we saw that the leaves were not yellow but brown and shrivelled. We noticed that other trees were withering too. Among the green canopy the leaves fell slowly towards the ground as if the winter was making an entry in July.

The radio program was interrupted by an emergency announcement:

There is an extreme heatwave and high risk for forest fires across the country. Due to the drought, making fires is strictly prohibited. Drinking water is provided for those towns where the water has run out.



After the announcement the radio presenter talked about farmers who saw no other option than to emergency slaughter animals. The public were urged to buy domestic meat. And to use water sparingly, only for that which is absolutely necessary.

Avoid doing the dishes or brushing teeth under running water, do not water the garden. Take a shower together with your friend to save the water.

They encouraged all kinds of creative ways to save water. I listened quietly. When the program was over, I exclaimed:

What about all the toilet water?!

In that instance our thoughts concretized. The question formed the answer which brought us through the barbed wire-fence:

What do we do today, that in the future can be seen as irresponsible?







Additional contributing artists







172 Jubilee collection, made from recycled Reijmyre glass



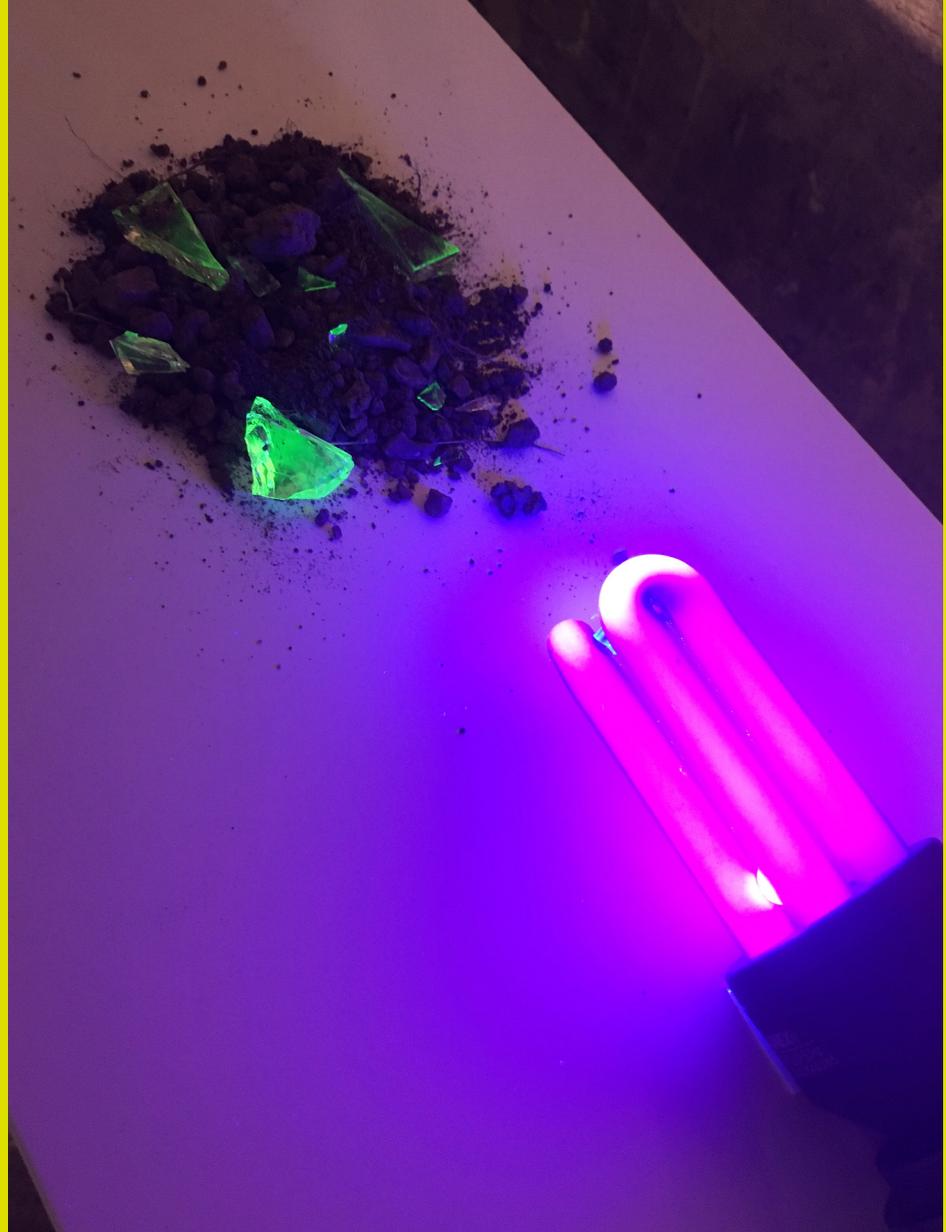
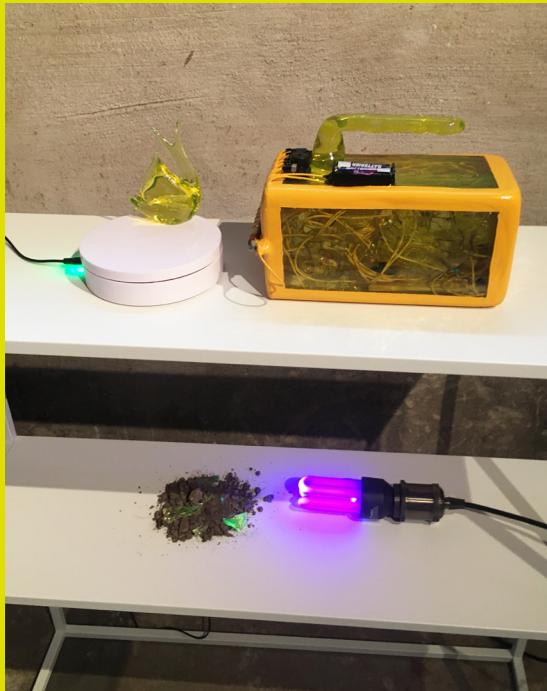
BOOM!

173



Image from Rejmyre Glass museum

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- Starr
- Glasri
- Formg
- Forme
- Verkmä
- Slipare
- Grovelip
- Sandslip
- Finslipare
- Sandmak
- Ben och k





















Contributors



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KULTURFOND KULTURRÅDET





“This publication assembles some of the critical results of our study of the contaminated site, in the form of a series of artworks. Each work presents its own set of questions and challenges to constituting the act of cleaning up, the definition of the waste itself and the task before us. We offer these pre-studies to accompany the other expert testimony as we grapple with this waste, our reluctantly shared inheritance.”

Daniel Peltz, Research Director
Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies



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