

MARIA ERIKSON MFA THESIS PROJECT

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MFA thesis project
Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki
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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

My master's degree thesis project includes two artistic projects and a written component. The emphasis is placed on the artistic research and the methodology of artmaking. This paper presents insights from my investigation and analyses as follows: foreword; continued by chapters *Two Bodies* and *Borderspace*, each dedicated to one of the artistic components; fourth part, *Recollection*, concludes the work process and exploration.

Two Bodies

Installation with imprint on paper and lithographic stones.

Measurements: 260 × 230 cm (installed lithographs), 214 (L) × 156 (W) × 22 cm (H)
(three lithographic stones installed on top of the wooden beams)

Materials: lithographic limestones with an imprint of a body, wooden beams, lithographs on Japanese Gampi paper, vaseline.

First artistic component of my thesis project, *Two Bodies*, was displayed during the *Kuvan Kevät* degree exhibition 04.05–02.06.2019 in the Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki.

Borderspace

Site specific installation.

Measurements: 64 m², height approx. 3 m

Materials: handmade hemp paper, hemp and flax fiber, gum arabic.

Second thesis exhibition *Borderspace* was shown in the Project Room gallery in Helsinki 22.02–08.03.2020.

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FOREWORD

Bodily communication and contact are significant in my artistic practice. Touch is an important sense I use to identify and perceive information about the materials I am using, in addition to making artistic and technical decisions involved in print processes. According to Lynette A. Jones: "The sense of touch is engaged whenever we want to communicate using the skin". (Jones 2018, 88.) This resonates with printmaking as touch is integral throughout the process, not only between objects and materials but also between those objects, materials and human skin. During my printmaking education I have been taught to test the dampness of a sheet of printing paper against my chin, finalize wiping intaglio plates with my palm, and not to use leather cuffs on roller handles when inking the image on the lithographic stone in order to achieve better contact. All these advised working methods are based on the sensitiveness of a touch and its ability to read surface texture.

In printmaking discourse touch is necessary to transfer information from one surface to another. A tangible surface is used as a base for producing multiple prints onto the surface of support. Within print vocabulary, the printing surface is called a matrix while support refers to the surface that receives the transfer. In my artistic practice, I engage with these surfaces in a close proximity and explore meanings and transformations they produce in the event of a contact. Informed by etymological and technical interpretations of matrix, I view it as a surface of reproduction, while also juxtapositioning the surface of my own female body and a lithographic limestone used for printing.

Gestures and methodology are embedded in the printmaking technology. This is accentuated by how printed artwork is categorized or described by media processes or tools. The terminology used has multilayered connotations. André Béguin writes: "[...] etching is used to

denote the process, the plate on which it is done, and the impression itself". (1981/2000, 81.) Naming the method of making, points to the physical or chemical force involved in creating or manipulating tangible surface: erosion, cutting, scraping. To give another example, the word lithography originates from Ancient Greek and means writing on the stone. This designation emphasizes the relevance of process, points of contact, materials and tools, along with labor, acts of care and bodily activity involved in the event of producing a print. To borrow Clare Humphries' phrase, printmaking can be described as "sets of relationships" (2013, 243). It is a joint process of visible and invisible matter and meaning.

My artistic exploration is heavily informed and supported by my experience as a professionally skilled collaborative printer in lithography. My body is trained to remember both technical operations and tactile sensations involved through all the corporal activity that is included in the process of making a print. Labor and maintenance are mundane in printmaking. Although, these are invisible dimensions of craft-based art which aren't generally reflected nor presented in an artwork itself. This is also pointed out by Kathryn J. Reeves: "We describe our work not by what we see in a print, but by what we do not see [...]". (2001, 2.) This recognition has made me curious about bodily involvement in art-making. To further explore these affiliations I partook in a workshop about connecting to the body in one's creative practice prior to research presented in this paper. Through a series of exercises, the course broadened my perspectives of exploring how the body or its embodied presence relates to my work. Engaging with objects, sensing the minor internal movements along with moving dynamically in space and time, deepened my understanding of pathways between perception, bodily structures, movement in the context of touch in my print practice. I am now more aware of the labor and trained bodily

movements that I naturally rely on when printing. By implementing these experiences in my practice, I seek to visualize the elements in printmaking that we do not see but already describe.

My artistic research is rooted in the material and materiality as Humpries distinguishes, “[...] matter is the discrete material, the concrete thing (paper, ink, matrix, ferric chloride)” and “[...] materiality is the engagement between bodies, tools, materials and substances that occur through this matter”. (2011, 243.) In my body of work, change and layering of meaning are produced through active bodily involvement and contact between objects, materials and surfaces. A corporeal trace is transferred from one surface to another and in this way extended through the print media and the notion of time.

Printmaking is a complex language. It intertwines materials and materialities, etymological and technical interpretations of terminology involved, together with haptic as well as cognitive bodily connection. To conclude, I am not so much interested in what printmaking can depict but rather what it can do. Through exploring ideas of material and materiality, along with the meeting points and entanglement between these elements, I seek to grasp the matter and presence of a touch as well as layering of memory that documents these actions.

Synopsis of artistic components

With *Two Bodies* I am exploring the process of bodily communication and exchange, contradictory feelings that are often included in artistic practice, and their transformation through the process of creating. My body performs as an artistic tool, moving over the surface of lithographic limestones leaving an intuitive corporeal trace; an

immediate experience of the artist. Limestone's natural receptiveness to grease enables observation and I map this dialogue by using a greasy substance for creating imprints of my own body on its surface. Stone reacts to the material applied and the artist responds, the result is a recording of both conscious and involuntary body movements, composed of time through action. Limestone's receptiveness to grease can be seen as an ability to memorize experiences, both positive and negative, like our bodies have the ability to remember as well as inherit pain and trauma. When these two elements meet – active body and passive stone – matter and presence is captured through non-violent chemical reaction. Physical properties of the stone, strength, stability, but also adaptability become intertwined with the image and are in this way attributed to the body.

Both bodies – the stones and the imprint of my body – are exhibited in the gallery space. The three limestones are elevated from the floor by the support of wooden beams. Several impressions of the corporeal movement are printed in lithography technique on translucent Japanese Gampi paper. Reproduced imprints are layered vertically and form almost three meter wide wall hanging alongside the stones. Sheer Gampi paper evokes delicate layers of skin-like tissue and its contrast to heaviness of the stones is emphasized by the light gleaming through a large window. Another translucent imprint of a human body is visible on the surface of the stones, suggesting new possibilities of contact and loss, as well as the impermanence of a body.

Borderspace delves deeper into multiplication, methodology and maintenance in the context of materiality and time. With this artistic process I approach papermaking through similar material elements and workflow known to me from lithography. I seek to voice new materialities as I combine gum arabic and re-purposed, previously

rejected lithographs printed on sheets made from hemp fiber, along with assembling new bodily paper structures. Handmade paper evokes connotations to skin-like tissue and gum arabic is emblematic to fluids conditioning life, foremost the ability to absorb and hold water. I have chosen to exclude transferring ink from one surface to another but continue to engage with touch and bodily entanglement along with the loss of those connections within my artistic practice.

With this artwork I explore the presence of physical objects essential to my artistry, and further analyze the ephemeral nature of contact as well as the material itself, and ultimately the human condition. This body of work is an assemblage of paper structures in various measurements, none of which is distinguished as an individual artwork, but rather, an unsparable collective. *Borderspace* forms an installation in the whole exhibition space; the artworks are displayed as an installation on the floor, wall, and hung from the ceiling. Through wear, pressure, friction and re-use I am exploring jointness and indifferences of human and inhuman bodies, their bodiliness and ability to inhabit shared space.

Two Bodies. Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki 2019. Photo: Maria Erikson



Borderspace. Project Room, Helsinki 2020. Photo: Maria Erikson



TWO BODIES

Matrix

Etymological and technical interpretations of matrices along with evoked connections between limestone and skin, meet in my artwork *Two Bodies*. The work makes a comparison between two surfaces: the lithographic stone and my own body, both of which are able to receive touch, and reproduce. This approach is informed by the technological definition of matrix as a surface to print from, the womb-uterus connotations, woman as a rock discourse, along with the “rock” being a mythological symbol for fertility (Hawkes 1951/2009, 100). I view my female body and the lithographic limestone as equal collaborators and explore the possible outcomes of touch between these two surfaces. I am interested in how to trace one’s touch into another and how those meeting points are layered, memorized and possibly, reproduced.

Within printmaking terminology, the surface used as a base for producing multiple prints from, is called matrix. Furthermore, matrix is any mold or die bearing an intaglio or relief image or text which is inverted as compared to the original (Béguin 1981/2000, 231). The word originates from Latin and has carried meanings “mother”, “breeding female”, and in late Middle English “womb” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d). These reproductive connotations in printmaking suggest reproducing material, text or image, attributing surfaces like plate, stone, or block, a female or matriarch-like significance.

British archeologist and writer Jacquetta Hawkes describes how Bronze Age circles and menhirs are thought to be men or women: “In all these legends human beings have seen themselves melting back into rock, in their imaginations must have pictured a body, limbs and hair melting into smoke and solidifying into these blocks of sandstone, limestone and granite”. (Hawkes 1951/2009, 101.) Hawkes also points out that

names given to those rocks for identification imply they were most often seen as female as well as suggest a sense of kinship. Hawkes writes: “[...] for somewhere in the mind of everyone is an awareness of woman as earth, as rock, as matrix”. (1951/2009, 101.)

I feel a sense of kinship to the lithographic limestone – a matrix that has been part of my artistic practice for a long period of time. I recognize my closeness with lithographic stone as Hawkes continues to reflect on the kinship between sculptors and rocks by suggesting that perhaps Rodin was “[...] inclined to sentimentalize the relationship by dwelling on the softness of the flesh in contrast with the rock’s hardness”. (1951/2009, 102.) Furthermore, Hawkes explains that Henry Moore “[...] returned to English stones and used them with a subtle sensitiveness for their personal qualities.” (1951/2009, 102.) In my artistic practice, I too have started to notice stone’s “personal qualities”, their resemblance to the human body and in particular, skin. Despite the evident differences of temperature and firmness between these two surfaces, there is also something skin-like of the porous texture and abrasive nature of a limestone. Garo Antresian describes limestones used for planographic printing as hard and brittle, easily chipped and broken, and should be handled with care (1971/2009, 20), as our skin is resistant but also vulnerable. Human skin is “the largest and heaviest of all the sense organs,” (Jones 2018, 10) and “skin senses are touch, temperature, pain, and itch”. (Jones 2018, 9.) Similarly, how human skin is receptive, limestone is acceptant to greasy substances. Stone, as a receptor, a participant in contact, stores the imprint of a touch, which then can be multiplied in the printing process.

These observations lead me to seek connectivity between myself and the non-human body – the stone, along with uniting different connotations of matrix through the notion of touch in my artwork

Two Bodies. This work examines limestone's receptiveness to grease as an ability to layer information produced by contact, similarly to how our bodies have the capability to memorize and record experiences. Bessel A. van der Kolk describes the body's ability to record in the context of trauma "[...] trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body". (2014, 21.) My artistic intentions are not focused on traumatic events but rather in the tactile experiences of shared touch, care for one another, and impressions produced by it. "Touch and temperature contribute to the discriminative functions of the skin by providing us with information about temporal and spatial events on the body". (Jones 2018, 9.) I chose to examine perception, bodily structures, movement, creation, and reflections between human and non-human bodies by leaving an imprint of myself on the stone's surface, as if I was "melting back into rock". (Hawkes 1951/2009, 10.)

Contact event

Printing is a bodily activity. It involves touch between at least two surfaces, objects or bodies. With the force of pressure an imprint is transferred from one surface to another. I define printing as a contact event, a phrase Dr. Jennifer L. Roberts (2021, 32:43) uses to describe the process of pressure and release from which the print emerges. My artwork *Two Bodies* comprises three recorded contact events.

My preparations for a contact event between my own body and the lithographic stone were informed by three technical aspects of the printing process. Firstly, the print is always accurate to the size of the surfaces in contact. Therefore, I chose to work with three large scale limestones positioned edge to edge on top of wooden slats on my

studio floor. Secondly, lithographic stone as material is responsive. The amount of information recorded on its surface is in direct correspondence to the grease content of materials applied. Greasy substance is required as chemical properties of the stone then allow stabilizing the image on its surface and facilitate multiplication of the image onto sheets of paper. Even though natural fats in human skin often leave a mark on the stone, I additionally used vaseline to ensure the registration of my body's traverses. Thirdly, once greasy marks are applied to the stone, they cannot be removed unless erased physically with abrasive materials or by strong chemical reactions. Acknowledging that, I knew my corporeal trace on the stone would be immediate and unchangeable, unless fully erased by grinding, enabling repeating the tracing activity from the beginning.

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The set-up for the contact event in my studio space was staged, awkward, but also sacred and intimate. The extreme awareness of the outlines of my body as well as the restricted surface area of the stones made me hesitant and apprehensive as I was figuring out the suitable way to approach a prepared surface. I planned my movements beforehand, the first touch with the stone along with the release from it.

The performative act was charged with sensation. When mapping and positioning myself on the surface of stones, I could feel the minor internal movements along with my bodily effort to grasp the existing spatial structures of both the body and stones, while experiencing the borders of the latter limiting my movement. My appreciation of the extent of my own bodiliness and its surface area was confronted by the framework, as well as the flatness of the stones. There was an affinity between the active body and the passive stone, but simultaneously

the lack of it. I experienced the challenging contrasts between warm and cold, soft and hard, supple and brittle as well as differences in weight. I noticed the subtle change in how I perceived the stone while slowly moving across the surface. I soon found it less cold, less hard, and almost weightless. My body, on the other hand, grew heavier, more grounded, and passive. I was able to distinguish a transformation in both surfaces, both bodies, and participants.

This experience parallels how artist Nona Inescu describes her process of placing herself on top of the stones or attaching them to her body: “When interacting with us, objects exert a “body language”, they become animated with skin, bones, and muscles”. (Inescu, n.d.) I agree with Inescu that when we touch objects, they are in addition touching us, it is as if we “[...] extend our bodies through objects, to make them become part of us”. (Inescu, n.d.) My apprehension of the extent of my own bodiliness and its surface area was confronted by the framework, as well as the flatness of the stones, and thereby transformed within the process. While pressing myself against the stone its physical properties: strength, stability, but also adaptability became intertwined with my experience and were in this way attributed to the body. The collected histories of both surfaces met, and as a result my body was then charged with the stone and *vice versa*.

In this contact event my body can be defined as a matrix, stone support, and a drawing tool. Support in printmaking terminology denotes surfaces receiving the print, such as sheets of paper. My body weight pressed against the stone provided the pressure needed for image transfer, followed by the release which then revealed the imprint of the matrix on the support – the stone. Through this contact event, corporal exchange is scanned and stored between the surface of the stone and the surface of my body. The imprint on the stone is proof of the areas

of touch. However, the imprint does not represent an accurate record of touch but one that has already been altered according to the forms of surfaces involved. The evidence of movement is present on stones, but the amount of surface mapped either in horizontal or vertical direction is a less precise interpretation of a touch but rather a pattern or remembrance of the act.

The first contact event is followed by non-violent chemical reactions. The physical properties of a lithographic stone allow stabilizing the image onto its surface. Application of gum arabic and nitric acid solution results in change in the surface of the stone. Fatty bodies of a greasy drawing material combine with the calcium of the stone to form insoluble lime soaps that are highly receptive to greasy printing ink. This change is not physical but a chemical separation; calcium carbonate of the stone is converted to calcium arabinatate and calcium oleate, a surface that in the printing process repels oil-based printing ink through water, along with the one that attracts it (Antresian 1971, 266). Removal of original drawing material, which in my process is vaseline, reveals the impression of my body etched onto the surface of the stone. Through lithographic processing I have melted an imprint of myself into a rock, as a trace of myself now is part of the stone.

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Similar to the first contact, during the second contact event the pressure is followed by release. Image is printed onto the sheets of paper. This time the lithographic stone is the matrix that reveals impressions on sheets of paper as these surfaces are run through and pressed together by the printing press. Marks my body left on the stone can now be reproduced onto other surfaces of support.

During the first contact event the material for mark-making I used is colorless. Traces of my body on the stone are tangible enough for the chemical process of etching even though the thinner layers of greasy marks weren't readable for optical vision. The second contact event involves using printing ink and therefore reveals the connection points between me and the stone that weren't optically visible before. This made me acknowledge that the stone's sensitiveness towards touch is greater than my ability to visually or cognitively evaluate the amount of information recorded during this contact event.

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Two Bodies includes a third recorded contact event. This takes place between my body and the stone once the first imprint of body contact is subsequently removed from stone by grinding it off with silicon carbide grit and water. This is a very procedural process that requires certain steps, physicality and attention to detail. The aim is not to produce more scratches and remove all traces of previous contact – almost as a scar that takes time to fully heal. Grinding a stone can also be seen as symbolic to shedding of skin.

Adding another imprint of my body on the surface of the stone indicates continuous possibilities of beginnings as well as layering memories.

Impressions

“Print is a result of an impression”, Béguin affirms (1981/2000, 9). I have printed my body on the stone and then re-printed it on the sheets of paper. My body as a matrix is extended through the mechanical

process of printing, and through another body – the stone. The touch between these surfaces resulted in imprints and impressions.

Again etymological and technical interpretations of these notions overlap in the context of printmaking. Imprint denotes a “mark made by pressure”, and as a verb it defines “to make (a mark) on something by pressure; to fix permanently (in the mind or memory)”. (Reif, Levy 1995, 305.) The verb *imprimere* originates from Latin and means “press into or upon”. (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.) In addition, impression also refers to an individual print transferred from matrix to the surface of support. All these connotations suggest an experience or contact between at least two objects or bodies.

Brollo writes about memory and forgetting in printmaking: “Words such as ‘imprint’ and ‘impression’, terms reminiscent of the language of printmaking, create a sense of the past remaining visible in traces left behind, of experience literally leaving its mark on us”. (2013/2018, 197.) This idea resonates with me because when I think of memory and remembrance, what comes to my mind are the experiences that I have had, people who I miss or objects that I once possessed. It is the absence of someone or something leaving an imprint on us that evokes feelings of melancholy and causes us to relive those past situations. In my print-based practice, I interpret these indexical terms through the process of layering and removal.

The result of the contact event between my body and the stone is both tangible and visible on the surface of the stone. This trace is concurrently evidence and a memory of that connection. Thereby, the corporeal trace, my body as matrix, left on the stone is further available for multiplication through the process of printing impressions on paper. However, the imprint left on me by the stone is a memory trace which

alters with the duration of time. I am re-remembering the gestures shared between two bodies. I can describe what I remember but my body as a matrix cannot further pass on this information in a physical form. In difference from the stone, my body as a participant in this experience, recognizes rather than the contact event itself but the loss of it. Through this realization, conceptualisation of memory and touch I continue looking at both surfaces as areas of recording where memories and experiences can not only be layered, but in addition, erased.

The aforementioned process could be further linked to the notion of infinite palimpsest Reeves describes as a material that evokes skin:

Printmaking, imagined as an infinite palimpsest, is a material and conceptual surface that stretches across vast spatial and temporal distances. More than a two-dimensional surface, it is always in our now and always beyond it. Dependent on materials that are subject to touch, writing, drawing, cutting, scraping, erasure, deletion, and reuse, printmaking in all its forms resonates with the notion of palimpsest. The infinite palimpsest of printmaking exists; it records the past and awaits the future. (Reeves 2001, 1.)

Notions of memory and the palimpsest metaphor are intertwined in the lithographic process because layering is embedded in the material itself. The history of limestones is written in the horizontal strata of the nonclastic stone that contains microfragmentations of various forms of marine life deposited in calcareous mud on the seafloor, mainly formed between 136 million and 190 million years ago (Antresian 1971, 262). In this context, the surface of the lithographic stone can be seen as a surface of collected memories of both the pre-existing strata of the

stone and layers added on to the surface through touch. As limestone is formed as part of the terrain layer by layer, likewise, these layers can be removed by deletion, erasure and grinding.

The removal is inherent to printmaking. Plates are carved and etched, information is blocked as images are exposed onto the screen-printing frames or offset plates, images on lithographic stones are grained off when printing is finished. In order to emphasize the process of erasure and the endless possibilities of new beginnings that a print surface can offer, I decided to completely remove an imprint of myself from the stone. I documented this process by printing different stages of the removal which is done by grinding the stone with silicon carbide grit and water. Each imprint depicts a more coarse version of the same contact event. Final removal of the imprint left a clean porous surface where new altering cycles of memories and touch could be layered.

The whole process is presented in the installation at Exhibition Laboratory. Impressions of a contact between two bodies are printed on thin Gampi paper. Chosen paper emphasizes the process of layering touch as displayed prints overlay each other. Imprints of my body are altering with the transient versions of the same image. Three lithographic stones display another imprint of my body, a beginning of a new memory. The installation of the artwork at the exhibition space is a re-staged version of the contact event where the imprint first was produced, and is a representation of my artistic process.

Embodiment

Matter and meaning that stretches across the spatial framework and exceeds the notion of time is produced through engagement between

the artist; as a tool, body, matrix; and another porous, receptive surface; paper, stone, and again matrix. As a result of my research about entanglement between two surfaces I came to an understanding that touch, seemingly ephemeral, leaves a trace of memory layer-by-layer that persists even after the sensation itself is gone.

Contact between my body and the stone is a cognitive experience I can describe through re-remembering as it left an impression on my mind. As I grew into the stones, my engagement, in return, animated them. I melted into a rock and while its surface confronted mine, the touch was followed by a gentle chemical lithographic process, enabling further reproduction of that contact.

The matrix is the body, and the imprint is the indexical trace of the presence of the matrix. My body's movement is recorded on the surface of the stone, layered with awareness and intention. In this process, my body has become part of the printmaking medium and impressions printed on paper represent both my body and the stones. In these manifestations both bodies hold a narrative that has happened in the past, and the prints on paper represent, rather than the contact event, but the evidence of it.

Through a series of contact events that produced both tangible and cognitive meanings, and discovered that both surfaces – my body and the stone – function as networks of layered awareness and collected experiences. Both matrixial bodies are continuously borderlinked through traces of a touch that is embodied in the artistic process and resulting work of art displayed. This entanglement isn't only personified in the context of this research but also in every artwork where bodies are intertwined. In this process, I have started to think of myself alongside the historically sanctioned stone as a matrix.

Two Bodies. Exhibition Laboratory, Helsinki 2019. Photo: Maria Erikson







BORDERSPACE

Method

This process begins with fibers. Following the method of traditional papermaking, I chop the long hemp fibers into shorter bits, soak and bleach overnight. I subsequently rinse them thoroughly and clean out the remaining stem pieces. I put the mass into a beater machine where the metal blades cut the fibers and produce pulp. Once this is done, I transfer the fiber pulp to a vat and suspend it in a fairly large amount of cold water. I proceed to plunge a wooden form with wire mesh into a vat and pull out pulp, which is contained on top of the mold by another wooden frame. The excess water drips back into a vat through the mesh and residual pulp forms a wet sheet. I remove the upper frame and turn the lower frame upside down and press against a felt. Pulp material is transferred from one surface to another. I repeat this procedure until a pile of sheets has been made, each separated by a felt. I move the batch to a press which pushes out the unnecessary water. Then I take out the sheets from between the felts, and according to Béguin this is when the sheet of paper is “born” (1981/2000, 260). I pick up new sheets of paper from felts with a wooden stick and transfer them to another surface to dry.

I observe a sheet of newly made damp paper on top of my palms, and watch it sink around my fingers when gravitating towards the ground. At this moment, I recognize the paper as a surface of contact. The pressure from one surface to another, from the damp sheet to my hands, evokes similar sensations to the contact event between my body and the lithographic stone. While I hold the sheet, it is simultaneously touching me. As a co-connecting surface, paper can adapt to contours and transform their bodily shape accordingly. I touch the sheets of handmade paper and thereby imprint myself on its surface.

I define my research as an imprinting process as I repeat plunging papermaking frames into a vat and pull out new sheets of paper. After I press out excess water I take out the “new-born” damp sheets, I assemble them in various sizes and combinations. It is a collaging technique where damp sheets adhere to one another as I gently push them against each other, no additional adhesive is needed. Through this method, the individual pieces emerge and create larger surface areas that further evolve and deform when material dries in contact with air. In the resulting patchwork, the original size of the papermaking frame is still easily distinguished. Each panel affirms uniqueness along with reliance on one another, as they are concurrently holding every patched piece together. Assembled surfaces can be seen as consisting of multiple individual entities as well as interpreted as a single bodily structure.

Gum arabic is a most commonly used viscous substance in printmaking. It is a sap from acacia trees that hardens in contact with air. As a desensitizing agent in lithography this material, dissolved in water, leaves a microscopic water-receptive layer on the printing surface. This coating cannot be removed even with further additions of water. Gum solution, besides being a hydrophilic or water-loving material constituent to the medium I use in my artistic practice, also signifies the symbolic tie to the human body containing water. While the dried coatings of gum arabic suggest changeable conditions of human skin, it is likewise a stand-in for water necessary for human existence as well as the papermaking process.

In addition, gum arabic is a physical matter that can be both solid and liquid, while continuing to be the same material thing in both states. Likewise, stem fiber threads in comparison to paper sheets are both different in their bodily manifestations but simultaneously also the

same material. The amphibian nature of both of these materials lead me to the idea of combining them.

Motivated by this thought, I soak the handmade paper, some of which I have previously printed on, with gum arabic and hang them on a rack to air dry. A trace of gum arabic drips on the floor leaving behind evidence of its liquid state of existence. New mode of co-existing between fiber and gum arabic emerged in a transformed non-human body. In a sense, paper is now petrified and therefore can hold itself in an upright position. Its sticky surface is receptive to touch but extremely brittle in comparison to hemp paper without gum arabic. Properties of these materials are transformed through mechanical contact and entanglement between them.

As I pursue distinguishing matter and materiality as Humphries defines these notions, I emphasize that materialities are evoked through engagement between bodies, surfaces and tools (2013, 243). Methodological maneuvers induce mechanical contact and pressure between my body, the machinery and materials I am working with. Materiality and meaning is not only produced through following relationships and processes but in addition through the release and detachment of these connections and entanglements. Concrete things, tools and materials I am using in the context of *Borderspace* seem to possess abilities to evoke change and transformation. I seek to recognize these characteristics and their agentic capacity.

Force of Things

I have encountered and found the ability to recognize properties, function and self-initiative with inanimate things I interact with in my

practice. Materials and tools have become more than mere objects. I detect myself describing materials I work with and even artworks I create – bodies – without always distinguishing between matter, surfaces, human and non-human bodies. Unconsciously, I use human pronouns when referring to inanimate matter.

Navigating ideas and processes through material-based knowledge has evoked affinity towards objects as active participants in my artistic process. It is my impression that the materials I engage with have their own will to initiate and take action. Jane Bennett describes the notion of thing-power to voice the conative nature of things: “Thing-power: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle”. (2010, 6.) In this context conative bodies are human and non-human bodies “[...] that strive to enhance their power of activity by forming alliances with other bodies”. (Bennett 2010, x.)

Thing-power suggests agentic capacity has emerged or evoked by or with things, both human and non-human bodies can function as actants or operators. *Actant* is Bruno Latour’s term that Bennett uses for a source of action (Bennett 2010, 9). Bennett also uses words *actant* and *operator* as substitute terms for agents as a less subject-centered alternative: “An operator is that which, by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage and the fortuity of being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event”. (2010, 9.) As an artist I can both enhance and counteract thing-powers, I am a human participant in the assemblage of the force of things.

I recognize thing-power in hemp fiber and paper I produce in the sphere of *Borderspace*. At first, I believed it to be enhanced

by the physical properties of the material itself. Long stem fibers are extremely durable and resistant. Hemp-paper can be run through the printing press, folded, soaked, then dried, and again printed on without the sheet breaking considerably. Therefore, the artworks within *Borderspace*, can be dismantled to singular sheets that in turn can thereupon be combined in new different arrangements. Moreover, my paper-based artworks are assembled while the sheets are still damp. When hemp fibers dry, they shrink as water evaporates. This phenomenon unpredictably shapes non-human bodily forms that are continuously responsive to the temperature and humidity in their surrounding environment, and therefore, the body of work is further transformed while displayed in the gallery space. The existence is impacting the piece likewise the surrounding environment tends to have an impact on human bodies.

Forces such as absorbency, pressure, and bodily contact are inherent to papermaking procedures. Through haptic contact, I make decisions considering the technical tasks and choices along with artistic considerations. As an actant, I respond to the material behavior and decide how much pressure is needed when setting the paper from the frame to the felt, or when the sheet is not too wet nor too dry in order to be used in a creation. Transformations in my body of work are enhanced by the combination of the thing-power of the materials evolved and materialities that occur through contact of other actants, such as myself, and the contributing environment conditions. Touch evokes affinity and emotions of kinship between actants and thereby activates the thing-power. As soon as I have assembled a piece of artwork, it begins changing beyond my decisions and activity. Lambros Malafouris discusses the relation between the agency and causality, and states that material

engagement is the starting point for the emergence and determination of agency (2008, 23).

If human agency is, then material agency is, there is no way that human and material agency can be disentangled. Or else, while agency and the intentionally may not be properties of things, they are not properties of humans either: they are the properties of material engagement, that is, of the grey zone where brain, body and culture conflate. (Malafouris 2008, 22.)

Malafouris focuses on the “brain-artefact interface” using potter’s wheel analogy to look “[...] in between, rather than within, persons and things”. (2008, 22.) He sees potmaking as “ways of thinking” and “model of the active mind” (2008, 22). In this discourse my study about fiber and papermaking resonates with pottery as metaphor for agentic relationship. “First the hand grasps the *fiber* in the way the *fiber* affords to be grasped, then the action becomes skill, skill effects results and from those results that matter agency emerges”. (2008 23–24; clay replaced with fiber; italics added.) Malafouris does not imply that there aren’t any differences between the maker and material or that one of those operators, at times, wouldn’t have a leading role in the process. It is apparent the cause and the effect are inseparable. It would be impossible for me to make paper without getting my hands wet. Even though I have more accountability in the action, there is always correspondence between bodies involved in my artistic process, and one of which both can and cannot act without the other.

Malafouris emphasizes differentiating “prior intention” and the “intention in action” in terms of the relationship between human participants and the agency of non-human actants (2008, 29). Prior attention refers to the premeditated or deliberate action while intention in action

indicates “non-deliberate everyday activity where no intentional state can be argued as being formed in advance of the action itself”. (Malafouris 2008, 29.) Intention-in-action isn’t necessarily preceded by prior-intention. However, he continues to explain that prior intention is already shaped by what John Serale defines as “Background”, a notion that can be interpreted as pre-existing knowledge and mental capacities of the human actant. In conclusion, to enable agency, a skill-set is needed from my part to be able to perform tasks involved in papermaking. Not only the properties of the fiber enable the agency but, rather, my informed prior intention that accumulates through material engagement and becomes intention in action. This process becomes reactionary, immediate and intuitive because of the expertise that I have developed through time to understand these materials.

Borderspace denotes space where cognitive and informed actions are intertwined, and new alliances between bodies are evoked. This applies both to the sphere of the body of work and the physical space where artwork is displayed. I approached the fiber material with certain expectations that were exceeded through time and actions in the making process. I grasp the fiber and produce paper that further becomes a surface of contact. The paper becomes a site of communication, and is through that experience a tangible measure of the ephemeral qualities of time and space.

With the arrangement of artworks in the exhibition space I seek to emphasize the thing-power as an assemblage of actants. It is a tangible and cognitive sphere where bodies “[...] affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power”. (Bennett 2010, 3.) It is a theater of lived connections and remnants of performative acts present in my artistic processes. Artworks are displayed on the wall, floor, or ceiling,

and could be arranged in any possible manner each time they are displayed. The viewer becomes a performer in the space, a live element that can move around the structure and have various viewpoints, and thereby activating the installation. The methodological approach in my practice asks me to slow down and pay attention to the entanglements and small movements. In the sphere of *Borderspace* I am asking the viewer to do the same.

Care

Through the methodology of print-based practice I have learned to induce attentiveness to things. Materials and processes I am immersed with require constant care and maintenance. My practice involves keeping the printing presses in good operating condition; ensuring circumstances needed to uphold moisture or dryness; and maintenance, upkeep and cleaning. There are specific procedures in preparation and following the production of the artwork. Certain workflow is more than a necessity, it is also a way of interacting with materials and tools included in my practice. While I am providing a service, maintenance tasks become choreographed performative processes.

Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles engages with the idea of maintenance as an inevitable and vital part of communicating with the world. Ukeles deliberately focuses on errands and tasks in order to emphasize on their value. Besides collaborating with maintenance practitioners in a public sphere, the artist addresses care in private and domestic contexts, and the role of women in relation to maintenance tasks. My exploration of the methodological workflow of papermaking parallels caring for human and natural environments as well as looking after my

own wellbeing in the discourse of my artistic practice. I apply awareness and intention on maintenance within my artistic exploration, and its entangled connotations to what has traditionally been considered “womens’ work” and nurturing.

Furthermore, print processes intertwine with the history of contact relics, like the Shroud of Turin, Sudarium or Veil of Veronica. Dr. Jennifer L. Roberts describes how “[...] St. Veronica stopped to wipe the blood and sweat off the face of Christ with her veil [...], a miraculous image of the face remains on the cloth thereafter” (2021, 13:20). Image is transferred on a cloth through a direct contact of the face, thereby taken to be sacred. This interpretation of Sudarium resonates with me as Roberts continues to explain how it evokes printmaking through wound and wounding. Stains or traces transferred to a surface attest to the damage on another. For example, in etching a printing ink is transferred to support material from the cavities of the copper plate. As an imprint is evidence of both the contact and the loss of it, I have further started to think of it as a means to atone longing while mending those wounds. When St. Veronica wipes the face of Christ, she performs, along with transferring an image, an act of care. I interpret handmade paper in my work as emblematic of the cloth or blanket that conveys traces of touch.

Within printmaking vocabulary the word blanket denotes felt material the plate and paper are covered with before the force of the printing press is applied. According to Béguin: “The role of the blanket is to soften the strong pressure of the rollers as well as to distribute the pressure evenly all over the plate”. (1981/2000, 41.) When the term is used in the context of offset printing “[...] blanket is a cylinder, covered with rubber, which acts as an intermediary between the plate and the paper being printed”. (Béguin 1981/2000, 41.) The workflow of papermaking includes

transferring the paper pulp shaped in a sheet from a frame to a felt. These felts are also referred to as blankets and are used to distribute the pressure that is used to remove excess water from the sheets. Blankets in a printshop are handled responsibly with caution as they are as costly as they are crucial to the process.

The care ensured towards materials, is also reflected as care towards my own human body as an active participant in the process. My artistic practice implicates body effort and bodily commitment as working methods include heavy lifting, prolonged monotonous movements and air drying of damp skin. In some extremes, these dimensions of material and craft-based artworks lead to physical pain, blisters and cuts on my hands. Similarly, how my body remembers technical operations and tactile sensations involved in the process of making, it can also remember wounds and sore muscles. The work I employ to the process of creating art is also symbolic for healing the pain caused by the very same actions of making the work of art.

Cleaning, washing, mending, healing and caring are embodied in patchworked surfaces of the body of work *Borderspace*. Blanket, cloth or paper has a practical intermediary purpose within my working methods but moreover, functions as a metaphor for attentiveness towards materials and processes involved. My investigation of connotations of maintenance suggests the act of care and mending of relationships and bodies. The body of work can be seen as a documentation of the acts of often devalued tasks and errands, washing and wiping, involved in the production of an imprint and physical strain both on the materials and myself. The overlapping seams of the sheets of paper in my work emphasize both the visible and invisible dimensions and maneuvers of the production of the artwork itself, as well as the contributing human body who sews it together.

Separation

What is the agency of the one who registers the imprints from the other? This is not the agency of ego, and neither is it the agency of the one who is presumed to know. It is a registering and a transmutation that takes place in a largely, though not fully, preverbal sphere, an autistic relay of loss and desire received from elsewhere, and only and always ambiguously made one's own. Indeed, they are never fully made one's own, for the claim of autonomy would involve the losing of the trace. And the trace, the sign of loss, the remnant of loss, is understood as the link, the occasional and nearly impossible connection, between trauma and beauty itself." (Butler 2006, x,xi.)

Borderspace is a site of not-knowing. I touch the sheets of handmade paper and thereby imprint myself on its surface. I excluded the printing ink from this process and therefore cannot establish the contact lost when my body encounters the paper surface. There is a corporeal exchange that conditions the imprint but the evidence is absent.

"So it is not just that she is lost, and we discover her again to be lost, but that in the very act of seeing, we lose," Judith Butler (2006, viii) discusses the layers of Bracha L. Ettinger's piece *Eurydice no. 9*. Eurydice is not distinct, she is both fading and appearing on the surface. Butler also states: "The loss is neither prior representation nor redeemed and canceled through representation". (2006, ix.) Again, my body as a participant in the contact event, recognizes rather than the experience itself but the loss of it. In the act of the trace emerging, it also disappears. Different in their expression, the artwork Butler describes and my body of work are linked through layers of touch and the loss of them that evokes sensations of longing. Intrigued and encouraged

by eagerness to find out what possibilities might unfold, I keep plunging the wooden frame into the cold water and pulling out fiber pulp. The outcome, sculptural paper formations, are free from image, the visible trace, but not from the printed matter.

Printmaking and the methodology of papermaking I used in this exploration parallel through reproduction. Besides the presence of touch that results in an imprint, although not necessarily distinguished by optical vision, the multiplication of impressions come about as paper sheets are cast from paper mold one after another. In this discourse the sieve-like mold used to produce sheets of paper is the matrix. This reminds me of Béguin's choice of words, that the new sheets of paper are "born" (1981/2000, 260) when taken out from between the felts. The bodily strain and labor of papermaking correlates with how womens' touch and work have been understood in cultural history. Constance Classen writes that womens' bodies were seen as "cold" and "moist" (2012, 71) and they were therefore bound to the domestic sphere, to keep warmth, tend the predominantly tactile tasks (2012, 77). Touch, considered to be one of the lower senses, was also linked to the women (Classen 2012, 75). In this context it was well grounded that women suffered through childbirth, as it was seen as "a purely corporeal form of labor" (Classen 2012, 73). Imprinting process and childbirth is an exaggerated comparison but etymological connections between birth and reproduction in print media are self-evident. Birth is a form of separation, as is leaving a trace.

When I separate sheets from the felt and attach them to each other in various arrangements, new bodily structures materialize. The touch isn't depicted but is represented by its acquired cognitive presence. Bodily entanglement and thing-power enable transformation of material and matter. This can also be discussed as intra-acting. It is

a term Karen Barad uses instead of interaction. According to Barad, interaction takes place between pre-established bodies that then participate in action with each other while intra-action enhances entanglement (2012, 66). Through entanglement memories are laid and thereby past, present and the awaiting future are “[...] reconfigured and enfolded through the world’s ongoing intra-activity”. (Barad 2012, 67.) Barad states that the past is open to change, although the evidence of it can not be removed: “It can be redeemed, productively reconfigured in an interactive unfolding of spacetime-matter. But its sedimenting effects, its trace, can not be erased”. (Barad 2012, 67.)

My work at its core is about the human condition, about the permanence and impermanence of a body. By juxtapositioning bodies and materials, I seek to evoke intra-acting where temporality is made through entanglement of matter and meaning. According to Barad: “Being is threaded through with mattering”. (2012, 69.)

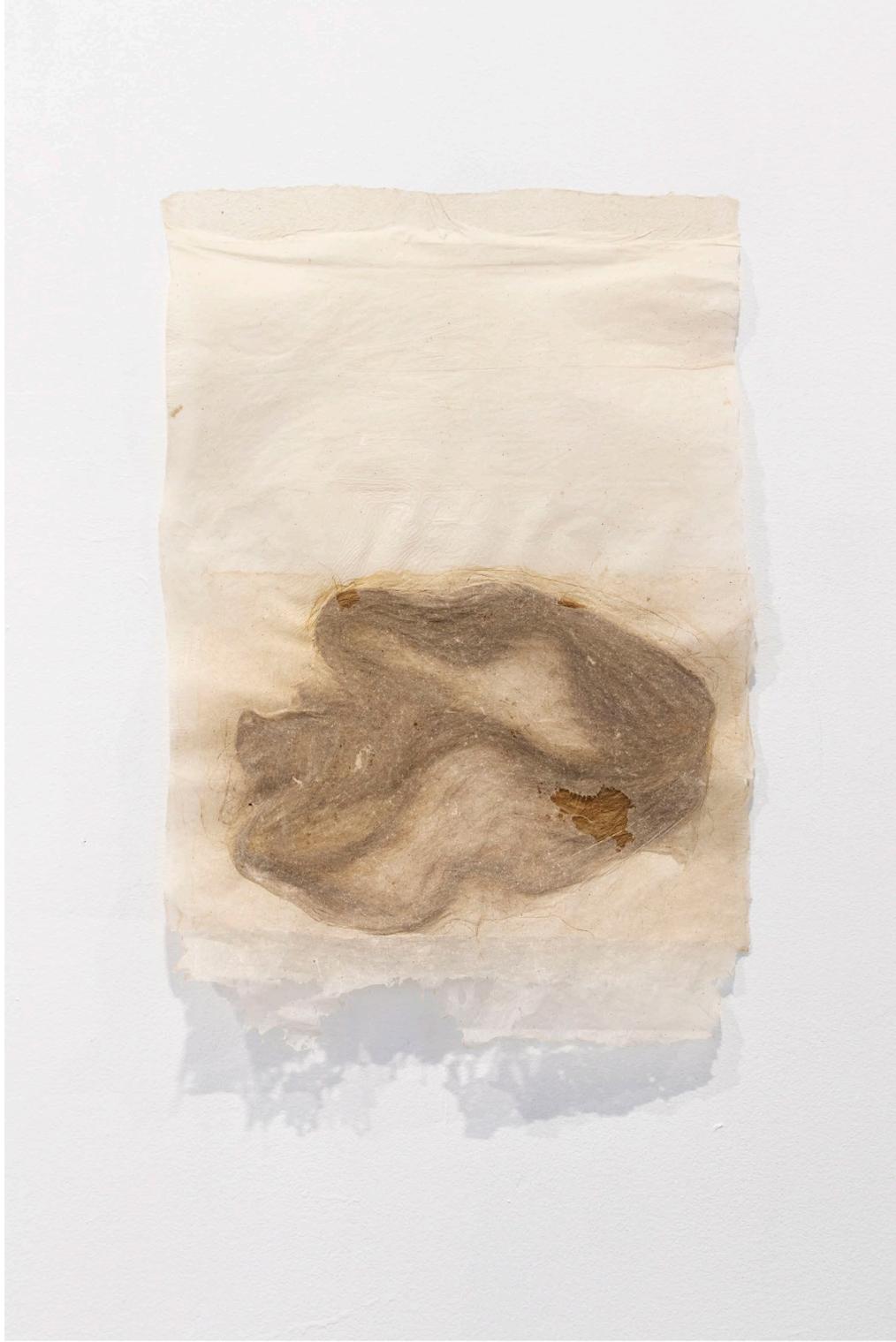
“[...] matter is dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming. All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world’s intra-activity, its performativity. Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through intra-activity of mattering”. (Barad 2012, 69).

Barad continues: “That is, differentiating is not about Othering, separating, but on the contrary about making connections and commitments. So the very nature of materiality itself is an entanglement”. (Barad 2012, 69.) My intention of registering imprints of my body isn’t about differentiating myself from other bodies but, rather, emphasizing connectivity between those materials, surfaces

and bodies. Through contact and trace, as well as loss and separation embodied in my work, I recognize and enable agencies in my practice. *Borderspace* is a platform for intra-active becoming where all bodies perform and enact, furthermore, form alliances. Change and transformation that occurs through this entanglement is a metaphor for the body and its existence. *Borderspace* is an embodiment of my artistic process but at the same time of the very nature of the human condition, its permanence and impermanence.

Borderspace. Project Room, Helsinki 2020. Photo: Maria Erikson















RECOLLECTION

My artistic research begins with my body “melting” into a rock and thereby imprinting itself on stone’s surface through touch. I extended myself as, and through the matrix. I explore bodily awareness, presence, and connectivity between intention and action in the ongoing entanglement between my own and other bodies involved in my artistic practice. Similarly, how Rosi Braidotti defines body, I consider each body involved in my artistry: “[...] a surface of intensities and an affective field in interaction with others”. (2012, 34.) As I myself am matrix in this context I consider printmaking a feminine process.

My exploration starts close to my skin. Pressure is followed by release and impressions are enabled through contact. The resulting artwork shows my methods of recording and presenting a corporeal trace along with emphasizing the ephemeral nature of a touch. Through technical operations and etymological interpretations, I have re-evaluated thing-power of inanimate actants involved in my creative process and acknowledge counter-surfaces’ contribution to haptic and cognitive bodily connection. While the first artistic component focuses on the contact of two existing bodies and the representation of them, then in the discourse of *Borderspace*, new bodily paper structures emerge. Interaction evolves to intra-active becoming. I move outwards in the sphere of my practice and discuss methodology, maintenance and thing-power embedded and conveyed in my artworks. Print process evokes both tactile and cognitive impressions that are captured in the temporal maneuvers of printmaking. I agree with Karen Barad: “[...] time is articulated and re-synchronized through various material practices. In other words, just like position, momentum, wave and particle, *time itself* only makes sense in the context of particular phenomena”. (2012, 66.) Within this research I have fractured the technical operations of printmaking and material matter involved into segments and sequences, and then put them back together. This strategic course

of actions provides insight to my ideas and thought processes that come about and develop through making. In a sense, I untangled the entanglement in order to understand the bodiliness of the medium, matters of care and shared experiences.

My body and my body of work can be continuously im-printed and re-printed, and thereby voiced through contact and separation. This entanglement isn't enhanced only by self-interest but is rather a co-connecting process, where none of the participants can fully represent the others. All bodies involved are borderlinked through both the sameness and differences they share and exchange.

"Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers", (Barad 2012, 59) in my body of work. As I have extended myself through the materials, objects, bodies in my work, they have become part of me. At the same time, I am a human participant in the assemblage of the force of things, enhancing and counteracting relationships involved in this entanglement. My body and its surface continuously seeks alliances with other bodies and surfaces through touch, that, seemingly ephemeral, through embodiment, extends through the notion of time. My artistic research and the works that emerged from this process are metaphorical of human condition, where both expressions and impressions of (material) entanglement cross the threshold of memory, permanence and impermanence of bodiliness and bodily existence.

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