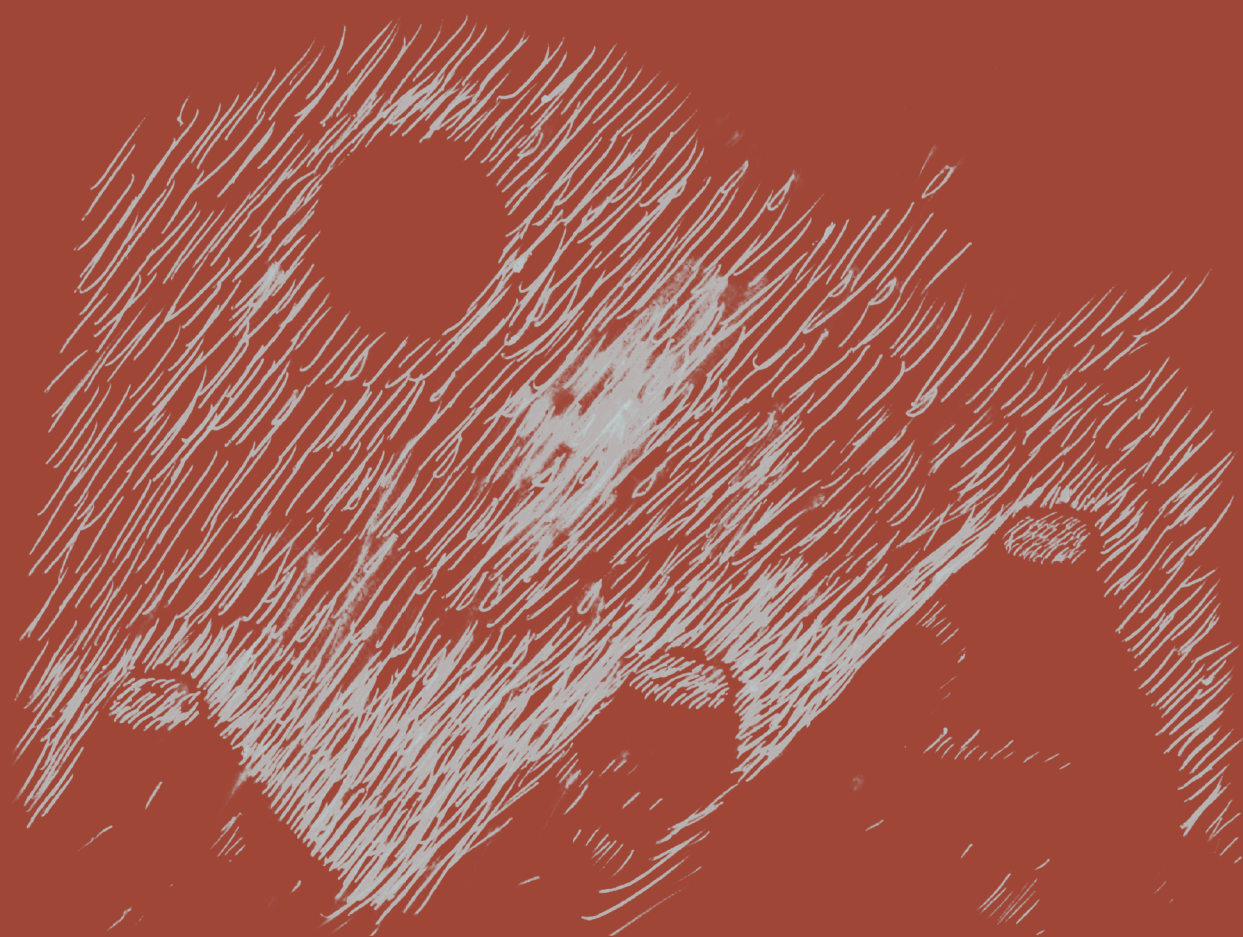


A FISH, A GODDESS, AND A FRIEND

How Three Ancient Artefacts Created a
Possibility for Anticolonial Understanding
in the Amos Rex Art Museum

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A FISH, A GODDESS, AND A FRIEND

How Three Ancient Artefacts Created a
Possibility for Anticolonial Understanding
in the Amos Rex Art Museum

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Master of Arts thesis, 30 credits
Art Education
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All the illustrations within the work were
produced in the workshops during January
2021 and belong to the writers and
workshop participants.

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Abstract

This thesis(?) focused on building new relations to objects stolen to Europe from the graves of ancient Egypt; namely a fish-shaped palette, a statue of the Goddess Sekhmet, and a coffin of Henu – the King's only friend. Written in collusion by two unruly nuisances disguised as a singular entity, this text is based on three workshops, which were held in collaboration with the staff behind Amos Rex art museum's *Egypt of Glory – The Last Great Dynasties* exhibition (9.10.2020-21.3.2021). The workshops, conducted in January 2021, engaged the community of the museum staff in exploration and discussions about museum exhibitions and collections, objects, *sah* (mummies), and colonial ourstories as well as personal and institutional accountability through art pedagogical methodology.

This text could be a map, a ghost story, a confession, a time traveller's journal, or a sea creature's witness statement. It applies the imagery and thematic tools of being covered by forest, lost at sea, and haunted by the ghosts generated by colonial logic and fossil-fuelled modernity, to approach the multi-faceted themes of coloniality, decolonisation, and oppressive structures within the museum institutions and the study fields surrounding it. It lingers, leaks, and causes uncomfortable itching.

The presented work consists of three parts. The first part maps the backgrounds of the work, the writers, tributes, objects, methodologies, and the context in which the work is situated. It addresses the main themes of the work and the workshops: whiteness, accountability, colonialism, decolonisation, and anticolonial action. The three objects in focus presented the three topics for the workshops: touch, grief, and accountability. The relations between the objects, these topics, the chosen methods of the workshops, and how they connect to possible anticolonial action in the museum are discussed further in the second part of the text.

The second part describes the workshops and presents the materials produced in the workshops, as well as their planned timetables, assignments, and final executions. The art educational methods used in the workshops included writing, drawing, working with clay, and facilitating conversations regarding the objects on display. The material was gathered through the writers' notes taken during the workshops, notes by the workshop participants, and artistically produced materials.

The final part analyses the workshops, the work process as a whole, and how and whether the initial thesis questions were answered through the workshops, utilising the ideas of Post Qualitative Inquiry. Writing through and with the collected materials, the final part of the text collects and weaves the experiences, discussions, and other materials into an account that presents one possibility of reality created within the workshops. The writers found that the workshops did further the understanding and activated discussion on decoloniality and anticolonial action within the Amos Rex museum, but the nature of the text relies on understanding and experiences that exceed traditional academic analysis or conclusions.

Keywords ancient Egypt, Amos Rex, museum pedagogy, museums, objects, colonialism, anticolonialism, decolonisation, workshop-based learning, touch, grief, accountability

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Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäyte(?) keskittyy uusien suhteuksien rakentamiseen esineiden kanssa, jotka on aikoinaan ryöstetty Eurooppaan muinaisen Egyptin haudoista. Työn keskiössä ovat kalanmuotoinen paletti, jumalatar Sekhmetin patsas sekä Kuninkaan ainoan ystävän Henun arkku. Teksti, jonka kaksi vallatonta kiusankappaletta kirjoittivat naamioituneena yhdeksi entiteetiksi, perustuu kolmen työpajan kokonaisuuteen. Työpajat järjestettiin yhteistyössä Amos Rex taidemuuseon henkilökunnan kanssa tammikuussa 2021. Mukana olivat Amos Rexin *Egyptin loisto –Viimeiset suuret dynastiat* -näyttelyn (9.10.2020 – 21.3.2021) työryhmän jäseniä, jotka työpajojen aikana osallistuivat keskusteluihin ja monimuotoiseen tutkiskeluun teemoina museot ja museokokoelmat, esineet, *sahit* (haudasta viety ruumis) ja kolonialistiset historiat, hyödyntäen taidepedagogisia metodologioita.

Erilaisista kokonaisuuksista muodostuva työ saattaa olla kartta, kummitustarina, aikamatkustajan päiväkirja tai merihirviön todistajanlausunto. Käyttämällä metsänpeittoa, merelle eksymistä ja kolonialismin logiikan sekä fossiilisten polttoaineiden lävistämän moderniuden generoimia kummituksia temaattisina ja visuaalisina työkaluina, työ käsittelee aiheita kuten kolonialismia, dekolonisaatiota, ja museoiden sekä niiden ympäröivien tutkimusalojen sortavia rakenteita. Se viiپیilee, vuotaa ja aiheuttaa epämurkavaa kutinaa.

Työ on jaettu kolmeen osaan. Ensimmäinen osa kartoittaa työn taustoja sekä esittelee kirjoittajat, kunnianosoitukset, esineet, metodologiat, ja kontekstin johon työ sijoittuu. Se käsittelee työn sekä työpajojen keskeiset teemat: valkoisuus, vastuu, kolonialismi ja dekolonisaatio. Kolme keskiössä olevaa esinettä edustavat työpajoissa tarkasteluja aiheita: kosketus, suru ja antikolonialistinen toiminta. Tekstin toisessa osassa esille nousevat esineiden, valittujen aiheiden, työpajojen ja metodologioiden väliset suhteet, sekä miten ne kytkeytyvät mahdolliseen antikolonialistiseen toimintaan.

Tekstin toinen osa keskittyy kuvaamaan työpajoja: aikatauluja, suunnitelmia, työtapoja ja osallistujien kerättyjä muistiinpanoja sekä muuta työpajoissa syntyneitä materiaalia. Työpajoissa hyödynnettyjä taidekasvatuksellisia työtapoja olivat esimerkiksi kirjoittaminen, piirtäminen, saven kanssa työskentely ja keskustelujen ohjaaminen kohti käsiteltyjä esineitä. Työssä käsitelty aineisto kerättiin työpajojen kuluessa sekä ohjaajien, että osallistujien muistiinpanoista sekä taiteellisista harjoitustöistä.

Kolmas ja viimeinen osa siirtyy tarkastelemaan ja analysoimaan työpajoja sekä niihin liittyviä ajatuksia kokonaisuutena, jossa ne asetetaan rinnakkain työn alkuperäisten tutkimuskysymysten kanssa, hyödyntäen kvalitatiivisen kyselyn jälkeisiä (Post Qualitative Inquiry) ideoita. Kirjoittamalla aineiston kanssa ja sen lävitse, työn viimeinen osa keräilee ja kutoo yhteen kokemukset, keskustelut ja muun materiaalin, joka muodostaa selonteon yhdestä mahdollisesta todellisuudesta, joka syntyi työpajojen aikana. Kirjoittajat havaitsivat, että työpajat lisäsivät tietoisuutta ja aktivoivat keskusteluja liittyen dekolonialismiin ja antikolonialistiseen toimintaan Amos Rex museossa, mutta työn muoto vaatii ymmärrystä sekä kokemuksia, jotka ylittävät perinteisen akateemisen analyysin ja johtopäätökset.

Avainsanat muinainen Egypti, Amos Rex, museopedagogiikka, museot, esineet, kolonialismi, antikolonialismi, dekolonisaatio, työpajaperustainen oppiminen, kosketus, suru, vastuullisuus

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Sammandrag

Denna avhandling(?) fokuserar på nya relationer till föremål stulna till Europa från forntida egyptiska gravar, med fokus på tre föremål; en fiskformad palett, en staty av gudinnan Sekhmet, och kungens enda vän Henus kista. Skriven av två besvärliga busungar förklädda som en entitet i texten, baserar sig denna avhandling på tre verkstäder, utförda i samarbete med Amos Rex konstmuseums personal. Deltagarna bestod av medlemmar från utställningsteamet bakom *Egypten – De sista stora dynastierna* utställningen (9.10.2020-21.3.2021). Verkstäderna skedde under januarimånad 2021 och engagerade deltagarna i diskussioner kring museiutställningar och samlingar, objekt, *sah* (mumier) och kolonialistiska historier, samt personligt och institutionellt ansvar, genom konstpedagogisk metodik.

Denna avhandling kan vara en karta, en spökhistoria, en bekännelse eller en tidsresenärs dagbok. Den använder bildspråk och tematiska redskap som "skogsbeklädd" ("metsänpeitto"), borttappad till sjöss, och hemsökt av spöken skapade av kolonial logik och fossil-driven modernitet, för att närma sig de mångsidiga teman av kolonialism och dekolonialism, och de förtryckande strukturerna inom musei-institutioner och studieområden som omringar dem. Avhandlingen dröjer, läcker och orsakar ett obekvämt kliande.

Arbetet består av tre delar. Den första delen kartlägger textens bakgrunder, skrivarna, tribut, metodiker och arbetets kontext. Delen behandlar huvudtematiken i texten: vithet, ansvar, kolonialism, dekolonialism och antikolonial handling. Det uppstod tre huvudteman för verkstäderna: beröring, sorg och ansvar, inspirerade av de tre objekten. Relationerna mellan föremålen, dessa teman, de använda metoderna, och hur de kopplas till möjlig antikolonial handling inom Amos Rex, diskuteras djupare i den andra delen av avhandlingen.

Den andra delen beskriver verkstäderna och presenterar materialen som producerades i dem, samt planerade tidtabeller, uppgifter och slutsatser. De konstpedagogiska metoderna använda i verkstäderna innehöll skrivning, teckning, arbete med lera och fasiliterade diskussioner kring de utställda objekten. Materialet samlades genom anteckningar skrivna under verkstäderna, verkstadsdeltagarnas egna anteckningar och konstnärligt material.

Den sista delen analyserar verkstäderna, arbetsprocessen som en helhet, samt hur och om de ursprungliga avhandlingsfrågorna fann svar under verkstäderna, med användning av idéer från postkvalitativ undersökningsmetodik (Post Qualitative Inquiry). Genom att skriva om och med materialen, samlar och väver den sista delen av texten ihop upplevelserna, diskussionerna och annat material till en redovisning som presenterar en möjlig framtid, som uppstod under verkstäderna. Skrivarna fann att verkstäderna förbättrade deltagarnas förståelse och aktiverade diskussion om dekolonialitet och antikolonial handling inom Amos Rex, men arbetets karaktär består av uppfattningar och upplevelser som överskrider traditionell akademisk analys och sammanfattning.

Nyckelord forntida egypten, Amos Rex, museipedagogik, museer, objekt, kolonialism, antikolonialism, dekolonisation, verkstadsbaserad pedagogik, beröring, sorg, ansvar

This work is dedicated to all sah lost at sea – forgotten, disregarded, dumped, and left behind. This work is dedicated to broken promises of rest and afterlife.

An offering

to all those forced back into daylight, under laughing eyes and graceless foreign hands.

This work is a dedication to objects displayed under cold lights and to goddesses that are too far from home. These words are an obituary, a confession, a spell, and a summoning. Please, haunt my flesh for the rest of my lives.

For all the sah lost at sea.

| | |
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NAVIGATION

Dear Readers,

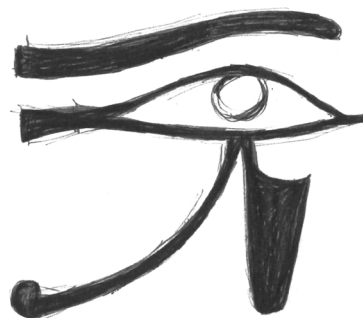
Before you move on, I wish to give you some tools for navigation.

As you may have noticed, the table of contents contains some rather obscure details, traces, and remnants, but they also open the contents of each chapter. You can use the table of contents as a map of sorts, or as I did, travel through time, ignoring the implied structure of the text. Accompanying this text is a glossary, a shadow, or a ghost, which can help you when some words hunger for more meaning or when there are questions left unanswered. But I make no promises.

This text is written by two white art educators, and the work is done in collaboration with a group of white museum professionals. It is also published within a predominantly white context (university and museum institutions) and if you at times feel confused as to whom I am referring to, it is towards those most likely to be reading this: fellow white art educators/students of art education, or museum professionals. I will bring up this whiteness throughout the text because it needs to be vocalised, it needs to be seen and addressed. You will find a lack of certain arguments because it is aimed directly at the voices that dominate, for example, the museum field – which this text largely moves within and around. It is aimed at the voices that uphold oppressive structures and colonialist strategies, and I refuse to give those voices additional space within these pages. You are free to call me a nuisance, as that is my *modus operandi*, my purpose and aim, to vex, to bother and to unsettle.

Between the following pages, you will later find small drawings and quotes by the other participants of this work, as well as exchanges between the writers. Silly details such as a wrongly typed word or a lengthy nap brought an extra amount of joy and motivation throughout the process, which I also want to share. I may have merged into one within the lines of these pages, but I have never once been alone, constantly writing to and with someone. Grieving with someone. Laughing with someone. The latter is of importance, as I came to find that merely typing some of the words in this text, over and over, was more draining than I was prepared for. My fingers may suddenly feel physically heavy and my neck stiff, or I may be overwhelmed by anger, unable to continue. Feelings that need to be dealt with, and which I do in this text. This is an invitation for others to join.

I am therefore aware that this text may also be heavy to read, and even though I cannot make it lighter – the subjects I touch upon should not become light – I can offer you some words of hope. The starting point of this work was my love and devotion for three ancient objects, for their pasts and futures. They taught me so much, and I was curious as to whether I could convey those teachings to others, and learn more myself, through artistic practices. Behind the objects are the people who once made them, carried them in their hands and who were buried with them. I am more interested in the *ourstories** which the objects themselves hold, and how they tell those stories to us, rather than in the museum labels written thousands of years later.



PART ONE

A PROMISE

In the centre of this work are three ancient objects:

a fish-shaped palette,
a statue of the goddess Sekhmet,
a coffin of Henu, the King's only friend, with his eyes painted on its side.

These objects were made for graves and temples, to be carried on to the afterlife, or to be worshipped and revered. I was captivated, intrigued, affected, and changed by these objects, but I was never meant to know them. The three objects were made to be entombed in graves or to watch over a temple, but they were uprooted and taken by hands that never knew the ones that made them. These objects were placed under strange lights and touched by foreign hands, with precision and cold efficiency. They were frozen in place, without the possibility of decay and returning to matter, becoming living ourstory in stasis, effectively undead. Now they sit and watch us, as we watch them.

These three objects belong to the civilisation of ancient Egypt, but I was able to connect with them as part of an exhibition, *Egypt of Glory - The Last Great Dynasties** (I will hereon refer to the exhibition as *Egypt of Glory*), which opened in Amos Rex art museum in Helsinki on the 9th of October 2020, running until the 21st of March 2021. The exhibition was composed of Italian Museo Egizio's collection and curated in collaboration with both institutions. I got access to the museum as the Curator of Education (Melanie Orenius), and I saw my chance to trespass into a territory that would have been much harder to explore in another situation, despite my agency within the museum field as a freelance educator (Kataja Ekholm). As part of this work, I directed and participated in three workshops during a three-week period in January 2021, for the purpose of spending time with the objects and exploring the topics I will expand later in this text.

I make a promise to keep these objects close throughout this process. However, despite the efforts made, the objects might go missing, disappear from sight or wander off at times. Keep them in mind, wonder about them, long for them and keep asking for them. The fish-shaped palette, Sekhmet and the coffin are our connections to the subject matter, our companions, unwilling guides and ancient hostages. This work would not exist without them.

THE PATH MAKERS, REBELS, AND BELOVED INSURGENTS

I owe all I know to the work and imagination of others. Others, outsiders, leaders, rebels, abolitionists, disruptors, insurgents, path makers, finders, activists, researchers, and cunning gardeners. My words were first someone else's, they grew different worlds and imagined new futures when my ancestors were forming their shape in the dark, warm water. Their names deserve to be at the forefront of this work, as a reminder, a sign, a love letter, and a tribute to the truth that the work I have done has been done before. By those who are easily forgotten, overlooked, and overtaken in the white academic world. Studies, texts, critiques, and actions in relation to (settler) colonialism, decolonisation, abolition, anti-racism, and anything else I summon into the space of this text, have roots that pervade the narrow ourstories and assumptions often relied on. Below I have included both writers and social media entities that have informed my views on the subject matter, as knowledge is not formulated only through deliberate experiences of searching, but rather continual osmosis of our environments and influences (this while being aware that these voices may not approve of the attempts of this text). They all deserve recognition as I follow their traces.

ALOK (@alokvmenon), Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, M. K. Baijukya (@afrobean.blues), Imani Barbarin (@crutches_and_spice), Rachel Cargle (@rachel.cargle), Change the Museum (@changethemuseum), The Decolonial Atlas (@decolonialatlas), Estelle Ellison (@abolish_time), Frantz Fanon, Avery F. Gordon, Lovette Jallow (@action4humanity_se), Nancy Jouwe, keiajah (@kjb.brks), Caleb Luna (@chairbreaker), Shay-Akil McLean, Eddie Ndopu (@eddiedopu), Walela Nehanda (@itswalela), NO WHITE SAVIORS (@nowhitesaviors), Alice A. Procter, readings on abolition (@abolitionongradients), C. Ree, Layla F. Saad, Shittish Museum (@shittishmuseum), Sonalee (@thefatsextherapist), Fannie Sosa (@fanniesosalove), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Eve Tuck, K. Raquel Willis (@raquel_willis), Wayne Yang

*“I was supposed to send that email yesterday,
but I took a nap and forgot.”*

(text message between the writers)

THE EXHIBITION

The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition connects to many contemporary topics being raised globally and locally within cultural institutions and museums. The main question, from my perspective, concerns the ethical sustainability of museum collections and the ourstories of their acquisition. How have museums acquired their collections and how these objects studied and displayed carry unspoken violence from colonial pasts? In museums throughout Europe reside artefacts from the African continent, India, and Asia as well as from Native American tribes and territories, which were stolen from local communities through colonialist occupation and violence to solidify the power of foreign invaders (see Hicks 2020 and Procter 2020). In a Finnish context, this regards Sámi objects, which the Finnish National Museum for example is now largely repatriating to the collection's rightful owners. (Kansallismuseo 2021) Furthermore, the issue is made even more complicated by settler colonialism, which means that these institutions that acquired their collections and archives through military force and other unethical means often reside in stolen Indigenous land.

Another discussion that the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition connects to is in context with the larger societal discussions of white supremacy and the institutions that enforce it. I am writing this text in a year that has seen massive protests for Black and Indigenous lives, amidst a global pandemic that has killed over a million people worldwide, especially affecting these communities and the Global South. I have had to interrogate my own privileges and positions within my respective institutions and communities (realising that this work is long overdue since the discussion is not new). As I am white, university-educated, and work in a museum, I am at the crossroads of many structures that uphold and reproduce white supremacy. Both universities and museums function as key enforcers of white subjectivity, memory, and identity and cast Black, Indigenous, and PoC¹ as the “other”, reducing their self-determination and subjecting them to continued violence of the logic of coloniality.

As I am holding the topics of colonialism, decolonisation, and white supremacy in the same textual space, I simultaneously do want to emphasise that we need very specific and intentional language when approaching these subjects, as they are not interchangeable and sometimes have conflicting interest towards possible futures. I cannot speak about decolonising as a mindset or practice, as it is always rooted in specific ourstories and localities (See Tuck & Yang 2012). I will return to this issue later in the text. This intentionality must also be clear in the differences concerning anti-racism and decolonisation. Decolonising is not always anti-racist work, as Black and Indigenous liberation are not measurable with each other and can reach for different futurities. Even if this work is focused on the perspective and work of white museum staff and educators, they are still important and current discussions that are needed when building new possible futures.

The topics of colonial ourstories, racist violence and decolonisation efforts can feel overwhelming, distant and too complex to engage without definitions and boundaries. For this reason, I was drawn to work with specific objects within a specific exhibition. The undead objects, the fish-shaped palette, Sekhmet and the coffin of Henu provided the opportunity to bring the subject matter of museum collections and ourstories into focus by creating personal connections to these artefacts and their context. What are their specific ourstories and purposes? How did they come to be here, exhibited in the Amos Rex art museum? How are we able to see them in the museum? All of these questions connect to the larger topics of colonialism, decolonisation and the accessibility of museum institutions. By having the opportunity to work with the museum staff responsible for the *Egypt of Glory* -exhibition, the objects became our anchors within the explorations of touch, grief and accountability in the context of museums and their collections.

1 People of Color.

COVERED BY FOREST

What is this text?

I have a lingering feeling of displacement when naming my process in the terms of research or study, performing the expertise needed and required from me to be legitimised and heard. It is the language I need to adapt to achieve verisimilitude that displaces me, loses me into the foliage. In my reality, I am a spectator living in the creases in the wall or hiding in the corner of the near collapsing roof. For the purposes of this text, I am not an expert or even a student, but something formless, growing and leeching. My actions then can be seen as a form of contagion, trespassing, and convoluting. For me making research or studying is a form of absorption, a process of bringing the agencies of others closer and closer until the separate is stitched into the familiar, made part through the forced cohabitation. Challenging notions, contradictions and ambiguous forms bleed until the remains can be called knowledge, certified, and approved, digested, and absorbed to the new host. Tamed and polite. I want to resist these modes of knowledge production and practice something queerer and more hospitable.

So, what is this work, if not a study? In Finnish folklore, being “covered by forest” (“metsänpeitto”) is the state of being lost in the familiar. It is a formerly known environment where you cannot rely on your senses or memories, as everything has become strange and unfamiliar. The forest that used to have ready-walked paths and recognisable landmarks becomes something unrecognisable and overgrown. Being covered by forest means being directionless in the once known terrain, being forced to create new relations and once unimagined alliances. That is what this work has been, a continuous process of transformation and realisation through failure in an environment that once felt intimately known. I had to settle into this new lush reality that defied words and slipped through my sentences. To the subject matter that expanded through every new experience, visitation, and tears in my expectations. As I was covered by forest everything resisted the restriction required from academic study and grew over the boundaries I was trying to draw.

This might not be a study. Instead, it might be a journal, a collection of scattered affects and experiences, documents of lost and haunted places. It might also be a witness statement or a signed confession. An attempt to form into a statement the subject matter that cannot be reduced into simple concepts. It could be an unfinished map, full of empty spots, strange creatures, and confusing directions. Or maybe this work is a logbook detailing the experience of being lost at sea. For we were, at some point, not in the forest but at sea, crossing it, sinking in it, and looking for lost *sah* in the depths.

This mapping, journaling, and confessing is a collaboration, inquiry, and an attempt to imagine new ways of relating to objects and ourstories within the context of a specific museum exhibition, *Egypt of Glory*. In the beginning and the centre of this process are the undead artefacts, which have been stolen from the ancient graves to be displayed for my pleasure and learning, as well as the effects working with these entities have had on me and the group of people I work with: feelings, needs, and thoughts. This process consisted of an exploratory artistic practise, in which I worked with the exhibition makers in search for possibilities to hold many perspectives and ways of knowing in the same space when discussing ancient Egypt through its artefacts and the accountability as well as the accessibility of these different types of knowledge.

I hoped to explore the possibilities to hold feelings of wonder towards ancient Egypt without reducing the rich history to the violence that the artefacts have faced in the process of becoming museum property, while still intentionally holding the museum institutions and ourstory of colonialism accountable and working through the feelings of grief in order to breach the distance

created to these ourstories. I wanted to ask whether it is possible to imagine and create space within a museum community that supports possibilities for joy and wonder as well as grief and pain, in the process of interrogating the collections within a museum and taking accountability in relation to the violent actions, ourstories, and structures that have made the exhibition possible. The objects on display were not only remnants of the rich and powerful of the ancient culture, but also the legacy of enslaved people, artisans, workers, scribes, priests, and all of those whom we have forgotten in stories and mythmaking. Ancient Egypt was the home of the *sah* that have been displaced and discarded.

The Process

As I am an art educator, I drew on my knowledge and past experiences working with different mediums to create the workshops that utilised art pedagogical methods within its knowledge production and space-making. I will touch on the specific workshop contents and contexts later in this text, but I will briefly lay out the educational and artistic starting points that guided this work. Notably, this work is not a form of artistic research but was moved by the ideas of using artistic methods within the communal knowledge production (for more, see Varto 2017). This work has been heavily influenced by the ideas of feminist pedagogy ((Laukkanen, Miettinen, Elonheimo, Ojala & Saresma (Eds.) 2018, Suominen & Pusa (Eds.) 2018, hooks 1994)) and connects to the topics addressed in human rights and democracy education ((Männistö, Rautiainen & Vanhanen-Nuutinen (Eds.) 2017, Löfström, Virta & Salo 2017, Finnish National Agency for Education 2021)) as well as global education (Gloabalikasvatus 2021).

In autumn of 2020, when I started to rough the shapes and format of my work with the Amos Rex art museum, art education provided an interesting framework of thinking and working through the questions of accountability and legitimacy of museum collections as well as feelings of joy and grief. Making and being with art is a practice of stillness and presence. Art can mediate our experience of the world and our inner dialogue, making resistances, uncomfortable feelings, and unseen parts of us visible for us to inspect and process. However, I want to emphasise that by art I mean writings, objects, and other material that I and the museum staff made and interacted with as part of our collaboration. The artefacts belonging to the graves and temples of ancient Egypt cannot be subjected to our understanding of art and therefore are not included in my understanding of art, but rather the undead objects are agents of their own which the group interacted with through artistic practices, like writing.

As mentioned before, to connect to the themes of undead objects, colonial temporalities, and complicated agencies, I had the chance to focus on ways art educational workshops can provide a platform for possible decolonial work within the museum. More specifically within the work community of the Amos Rex art museum, who design and produce the exhibitions, including the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition. The discussions around decoloniality within museums have predominantly been about diversifying the exhibitions and public audience work, to bring forward different stories, subjects, and viewpoints. (Jouwe 2018) This work, although important, does not address museums themselves as problematic institutions, with structures that alienate and oppress marginalised individuals and communities. I wanted to take a different approach and utilise my access to one of these institutions, to have difficult discussions through the involuntary evidence of ancient Egypt that had been placed in Amos Rex as part of the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition, acting as a welcomed guest, infiltrator, and facilitator.

The Questions

In the process of working within the museum, the institution became the forest that covered me, making everything once known unfamiliar and preconceptions visible in the undergrowth. Before stepping into the shadows of the trees, I had outlined the following starting points, questions, and landmarks. These questions are shown here as they were when I began the process. They are incomplete, lacking and overflowing. An attempt to create a map, trying to ensure I would not get lost.

How can artistic methods and practices work as a support to decolonial work within the Amos Rex art museum, and create a space for unlearning, joy, wonder, and grief, in order to move towards accountability and decolonial action?

How can arts-based workshops support discussions on decolonial actions within the Amos Rex art museum, which are rooted in object-based understanding and unlearning dominant language that distances us from the colonial histories of taken ancient Egyptian artefacts?

How can arts-based workshops bring us closer to ancient Egyptian artefacts and the process of decolonising our understanding of these objects within the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition in the Amos Rex museum?

How to create space for an object-based understanding of colonial histories and ancient Egyptian artefacts, like the fish palette, in order to imagine decolonial futures for the Amos Rex art museum?

How to hold a space within our knowing for both ancient Egyptian magic and violent colonial histories, without reducing ancient Egyptian culture to the violence of our ancestors?

How to practise grief before the statue of Sekhmet, and use that grief to guide people with colonialist/settler ancestry towards repairing their humanity?

How can eyes painted on the side of an ancient coffin work as a tool for discussing accountability and responsibility of the museum, in relation to ancient cultures and colonial histories?

I got lost anyway.

THE DEFIANT “I”

The Writers

For the purposes of this text, the personal pronoun “I” is expansive. It includes both writers, Kataja Ekholm and Melanie Orenius, as well as their inhabited knowledge and agency. The “I” is not a tool for synchronicity, confusion, or imagined unity. It is a form of resistance to the structured and falsely inclusive “we”, the institutional all appropriating “us”, and a form of accountability by shifting the “our” that is too comfortable in the mouth of the coloniser. “We” absorbs individual responsibility and power into the behemoth, the unformed mass, the chimaera of white skin and pointed teeth. “I”, in this text is entangled and unclear, defiant and an uneasy alliance between two writers that build upon each other, contradict each other, and grow into each other in different disjointed temporal positions. “I” contains multitudes but retains the accountability, the traces “I” leaves are not easy to follow but clear to see. I decided to settle into this form of narrating as I wanted to emphasise accountability that the discussed subject matter demands. The weight my voice carries is derived from its singularity, discord, and loneliness.

Through “we” and “us” I would invite the possibility of disappearing within the structures of the institutions I operate in. “I” takes responsibility that can be retraced to Melanie and Kataja, instead of “we” that is never truly known. “We” is also a false alliance to you, the readers, a distracting call into the subject matter through “us”. By refusing to uphold these forms of institutional inclusion, I am also free to become a traitor, a trespasser, critic, and an insurgent by hiding from the institution within the expansive narrator, or at least attempt to do so. If it helps, you can imagine me as two raccoons stuffed inside one, big trench coat.

The decision of using the expansive form of “I” does not come without its own pitfalls and obstacles. “I” is selfish, it is falsely independent, it creates separation and notes to capitalistic hyper individuality that pervades modern fossil subjectivity. “I” is never truly just a singular entity, as we are all interconnected to others, to institutions, situations, people, society, and our pasts. I still choose it over other forms, over other words and connotations. I can stand with the weight of the individual “I”. In its false individuality and singular loneliness lies space to operate and expand, hide and infiltrate in a way that is impossible within the hungry “we”.

The “I” in Institution

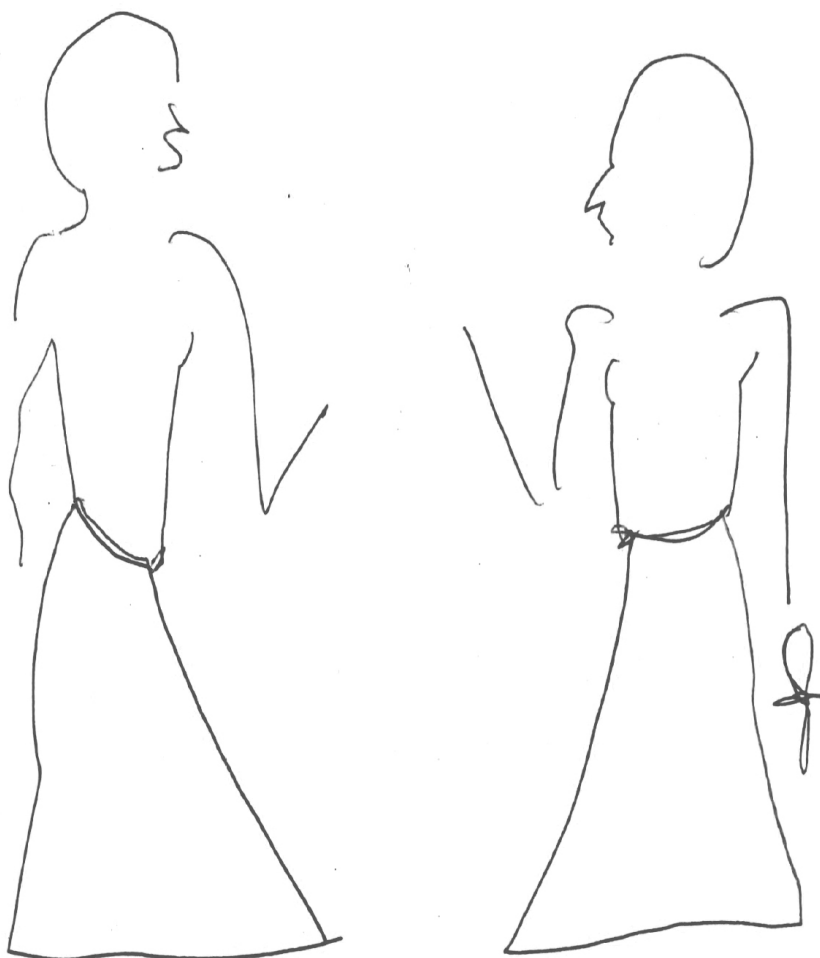
In the museum structure, I can never truly be an “I”. I can speak for myself, but when representing the museum, I must make clear which are my personal thoughts, if they differ from the museums, and at the same time uphold the ostensible unity. “We made the decision” and “we thought it best to” fall from my lips without thinking, without a chance to reach for it, claim it back, to explain. And in the same moment that I separate myself to voice my opinion, the protection of the museum “we” dissipates. In this writing process, and in the process of facilitating the workshops, I did not feel included in the museum “we” and also felt forced to exclude myself from it. It was a partly painful process, yet partly freeing. Not until I started using “I” in this text did I understand its importance, here and now, for me.

In the context of the university, I am allowed to be an “I”. I am expected to be a singular agent, with individual ambition and evaluable progress. But only until a point when it starts resisting the university structures, hierarchies, and bureaucracies. In the process of writing this work, I was constantly reminded that it must be possible to evaluate Kataja and Melanie as two separate entities. To solve this pressure, I decided to create a separate document that highlights the individual contributions of

both my entities, for the sake of evaluation. More performance than a document, something to map our agencies, the document is not published but provided to the university as private proof of the process.

I am aware that whilst writing this, I am not able to break myself free from the university, nor the museum. Regardless of pronouns or other defiant choices. I act within the “we” of whiteness and coloniality, within and with the university and the museum. Within my group of privileged fellows. But at least, I refuse to hide behind these structures. I am defiant, making decisions out of spite and rebelliousness, wild and uncompromising to the point of frustration. “I” feels right for me, it is a possibility and a space of sanctuary and resistance. My hope is that after this journey someone will share my feelings.

I could have decided to open these thoughts in the text and yet continue to use “we” – trusting that the reader understands whom the text is referring to; the writers. “We” however, began to hold such heavy meanings that suddenly felt shackling. I am so many things and I belong to many “we”, which is a wonderful thing. Yet the “we” that is acute in this text did no longer feel wonderful. I do not want the reader at any point to assume that you and I belong to something together. That I am calling you in to guide you to this subject matter. I am afraid that hospitality is not a luxury afforded when it comes to questions of white supremacy and colonialist ourstories.



TRANSFORMATIONS: BECOMING WHITE

In order to find clarity when being lost, I need to examine the positions I am currently inhabiting. Find my roots and the ground they permeate. This means exploring the transformations through which I become unrecognisable to myself. Just like when covered by forest, the transformation of becoming aware of one's privilege and societal position can feel alienating and strange. Whiteness in itself is a process of hiding, making artificial mundane, claiming innocence, and distracting through tears. Whiteness does not see itself; it slips from its own view while holding everything else in it. Everything becomes something in relation to whiteness; others, outliers, monsters, and beasts that lurk on its periphery. Becoming white has been a process of looking inward first, changing my own position, decentring through learning from those I gave a tribute at the start of this work, and aiming to put those teachings into everyday action. Becoming white is understanding how white supremacy operates and how our positions provide us opportunities, and at the same time keep us apathetic to the oppression of those excluded from them (see Saad 2020 and Kendi 2019).

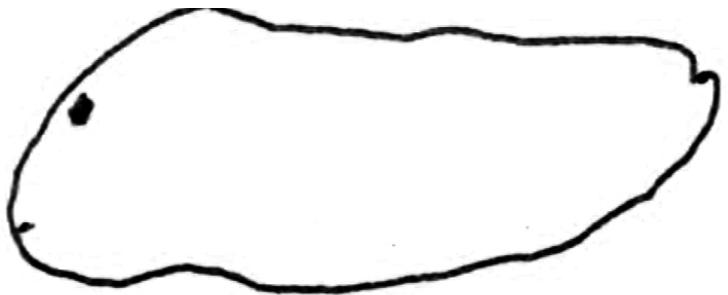
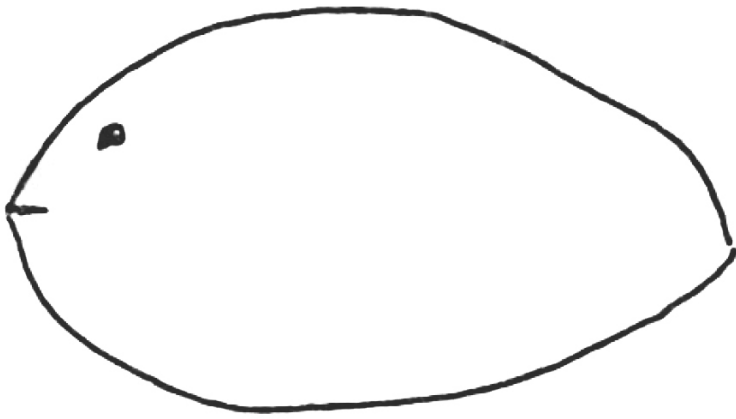
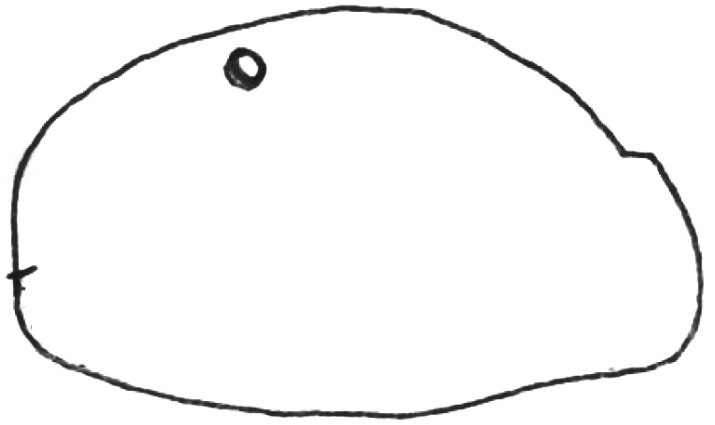
I aim to write openly through my position and agency in the subject matter of museums, white supremacy, and colonialism. My work takes place within the hierarchies and structures of multiple institutions, and I am not an outsider or outlier within these organisations, but an active participant and beneficiary. Through all my discomfort and lingering, hiding in the walls, I am still part of the institutions' structures. My societal and academic authority as a student and a future teacher is derived from the standing and establishment of these institutions, within the Finnish state and global networks. My logbook then is not an act of radical resistance or change, but the continuation of colonial white academia, which is formulated through the regulations and expectations of the university that the knowledge is produced in. I can perhaps get lost, stretch some boundaries, and leak through from unexpected places, but this work is still claimed as a MA thesis by Aalto University and evaluated accordingly.

When I move from the university to the museum, my assumed knowledgeability becomes seen as the expertise that enables me to work within the museum as an educator and instructor. All of these positions contribute to my survival within the framework of fossil capitalism, by providing me with income as well as state-provided assistance. I cannot claim innocence or separation, only culpability, and responsibility. However, this culpability within the structures I am trying to interrogate is also a position of power to act change and challenge the existing conditions.

This means I also have to face the possibilities for doing harm, performing actionability, and dislocating the conversation. This work, which focuses on new object relation-building, critical conversations, and artistic exercises, holds in itself the possibility of enforcing the existing structures within the institution it tries to challenge. By offering critique and conversation to create possible spaces for unlearning, I simultaneously offer the institution opportunities to learn and adapt language. To develop new policies and procedures that merely uphold existing oppressive structures, or more efficiently integrate them out of sight. Instead of actionable change, I risk bringing two institutions, Aalto University and Amos Rex, in contact with each other and creating legitimisation through visibility and purification through confession. This needs to be said aloud.

I am not the only agent within this scenario. The workshops this work is based on holds within them an interconnected network of agencies, alliances, and relations. Both the participants and the objects, stolen from ancient Egyptian graves. The act of appropriating these objects in itself is an ethical dimension that demands consideration. The artefacts we study, relate to, grieve, or seek change from, were never intended to be seen by us. The artisans that made the objects never could have imagined us now, staring and taking pictures and laughing and touching. I want to consider the

obvious lack of respect of the Indigenous systems of belief these exhibitions represent: by taking the objects from the graves, burial sites, and temples, they are effectively taken from the afterlives as well. Colonial violence is not only violence to material reality but violence to spirituality as well. Becoming white comes with the knowledge of lonely objects and empty afterlives, stolen bodies, and desolate temples.



TANGLED ROOTS ON MURKY GROUND

Museo Egizio

I am an inheritor of tangled realities. Hard, heavy pasts, and actions that have been called science, enlightenment, and progress. I want to lay them bare, flesh them and show their bones to the sunlight. Let me start with the cold actualities.

The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition consisted of artefacts sent to Helsinki from Museo Egizio, an Italian institution claiming to be the “[...] world’s oldest museum devoted entirely to ancient Egyptian culture.” (Museo Egizio n.d.) Museo Egizio has the largest collection of Egyptian art and culture outside of Egypt and has not been asked for repatriations from the Egyptian government. A big part of this museum’s story, the part left out of the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition, presents a great example of why decolonisation is needed, and why no one should be able to focus on only the ancient and/or the present when there is a long and violent passage of our story in between these two – hidden inside the walls of museums rather than on them.

Museo Egizio was established in 1824, based on two collections: of the Italian Gonzaga family and antiquities collector and diplomat Bernadino Drovetti. Specific origins of these collections and how they were acquired remain unknown, as most objects were bought through antiquities markets. The “[...] decree banning the unauthorised removal of antiquities.” (Supreme Council of Antiquities n.d.) from Egypt was issued eleven years later, in 1835, as a reaction to the heavy looting of the country – in which Drovetti, with his British rivals, was a pioneer. The governmental Egyptian Antiquities Service, officially *Service des Antiquités*, was then created in 1858 to control foreign excavation parties and the alarmingly extensive trading of ancient artefacts.

Museo Egizio widened their collection by half, from ca. 20 000 objects to the 40 000 in their collection today, when Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli became museum director in 1894. Schiaparelli ran several excursions to Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century. He had all the excavated items checked by the Egyptian Antiquities Service before allowed, or denied, to take them out of the country. What is however failed to mention is that this Antiquities Service was, as its official name suggests, founded and led by French scholars – in order to manage the handling of Egyptian treasures, and keeping this management under French control instead of British or Egyptian. Also more specifically, it was led by Schiaparelli’s former Egyptology teacher Gaston Maspero at the time of the excavations between 1903 – 1914. Schiaparelli’s archaeological campaigns continued until 1920. The Antiquities Service got its first Egyptian director, Mostafa Ame, only as late as in 1953, and has remained an Egyptian-run organisation since. Today, the former Antiquities Service is the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA). (Supreme Council of Antiquities n.d.)

Museo Egizio has, like other European museum institutions, participated in much more than simply widening their collections. For example important research, saving ancient artefacts and UNESCO World Heritage sites in Egypt, supported the building of local museums and thus keeping Egyptian artefacts in Egypt, and collaborated with the local Arabic community in Turin. However, knowledge is power. And knowledge of ancient Egypt was directly kept from Egyptians themselves for over a century, by Europeans. Only in the 1920s began a wider focus on training and appointing native Egyptian Egyptologists, and that was from the pressure of locals. (Penn Museum 1979)

Egyptology

Modern Egyptology is generally deemed to have been established by Napoleon Bonaparte's accompany, during his Egyptian invasion starting 1798. (Langer 2017) Here is however crucial to note that Egyptians had indeed been studying their own ancient ourstory for centuries before the French arrived. (El-Daly 2005). Hence using knowledge and academia as an argument in defence of Western Egyptology fails, like many other futile white defences, as the origins of Western Egyptology lie in power, knowledge, and cultural heritage, taken by force. Here I would like to lift Okasha El-Dalys work *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*, in which El-Daly aims to unravel the medieval Egyptian studies on the country's ancient ourstory and pinpoints the assumptions that some European and North American scholars still base their said knowledge on today.

In this text, I focus on three objects from Museo Egizio's collection, and it is vital that I am aware of not only their ancient history but also of how they ended up before my eyes today, and that I am able to question it. I cannot reduce these objects to merely problematic, nor is that my intention. But in my aim towards possible decolonial action, the origins of Modern Egyptology and its vast spread outside of Egypt must be acknowledged and spoken about by using some of its unfortunately rightful verbs: colonialist, racist, Islamophobic, anti-queer, Eurocentric, and white supremacist. Fixating on modern Museum Professional's, Academic's, Archaeologist's, and Egyptologist's good intentions, and on their often stating that "the objects truly belong to Egypt" even though they are in another country's legal ownership, is counterproductive – that is if I am to truly dissect, digest and take accountability. I do not claim that all objects should automatically be returned to Egypt. Nor that international accessibility to the objects, their ourstory and research is not important, or that their fascination and information should be limited. But again, I find that focusing on this rhetoric is exactly what keeps Western Egyptology (and white professionals) in power, and the colonial history of ancient Egypt unknown to most museum visitors – contradicting the very core of museums as sites of learning. Lower your defences if you have felt them rising. Sit with the past. It is uncomfortable, I know.

The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition also presented some objects from the collections of The National Museum of Finland and the Finnish Egyptological Society. These both own artefacts that have arrived in Europe by various "explorers", for example, Georg August Wallin, in the 19th century. Most lacking proveniences, or at least easily accessible information about their origins. The National Museum of Finland is, during the writing of this text, about to open the third part of their remade permanent exhibition, which focuses on giving the history of Finland a wider voice – by those who have not been heard in the exhibitions before. Project manager Päivi Roivanen says that the museum wants to bring up the fact that ourstory is always an interpretation, and comments on how there will probably be a continued demand for large "worldly" Western museums, like the British Museum, but also on how they are in many ways ethically problematic. Roivanen states that these problematics should be brought up to the museum visitors, and summarises some questions of the current discussions in the museum field – which also apply to the Finnish context: Why are certain objects raised to an iconic position, especially if they are connected to a colonialist power? Who has the authority to determine what objects should be available to whom? Who owns the collections and who is allowed to talk about them? (Kelola 2021)

Museology

Tiffany Jenkins argues in her book, *Keeping Their Marbles: How the Treasures of the Past Ended up in Museums - and Why They Should Stay There* that the disputes over repatriations and the, fairly newly born, pressure on museums to “do better” and actively right their pasts, is counterproductive. That we instead should be focusing on the good that museums are capable of, that which is possible. (Jenkins 2016) She also argues that the objects themselves and their endlessly interesting ourstories are being buried underneath these disputes, which ties into one of my questions in the starting point of this text:

How to hold a space within our knowing for both ancient Egyptian magic and violent colonial histories, without reducing ancient Egyptian culture to the violence of our ancestors?

However, Jenkin’s text seems to seep of thoughts implying that museums have somehow already embraced their past, and should be let free of it, to focus on the future. The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition provides an excellent example of objects with a very colonial past, exhibited without a single mention of this topic. And Amos Rex is not an exception. Alice Procter’s *Uncomfortable Art Tours* is a project that has infiltrated several big British museums, which contain excessive amounts of looted artefacts. The aim of these tours has been to unravel the violent imperial ourstories in the exhibition spaces, indeed counterproving the idea that these museums are open and honest with their visitors – or rather, that they are showing merely one side of the story as “history” and “information”. (Procter 2020) In addition, I simply cannot prevent myself from pointing out Jenkins’ way of neutrally describing the “great explorers of the past”. For example, mentioning neighbouring Swede Carl von Linné’s botanical endeavours, whilst casually leaving out the fact that von Linné was also a pioneer in racist human classification. (Kamali 2009, 146)

When working with the artefacts of ancient Egypt in a museum exhibition, it is always in relation to disciplines like Egyptology and Museology. Both of these modes of philosophical and scientific thought are products of colonialism and were informed by the logic of coloniality. Both Egyptology and Museology would not exist without the colonial practices of dismantling historical and cultural sites and artefacts of colonised subjects, and the need to store and exhibit these artefacts in a space that upholds the self-imposed superiority of the white West. The vast looting of objects through imperialism required the establishment of museums, meaning museums have at no point in ourstory existed as neutral places before this. (Azoulay 2019) Yet an unsettling amount of not only museum visitors, but the proclaimed professionals of these institutions, seem largely unaware or ignorant of the ourstory of their very own chosen career paths. It is entirely possible to graduate with a degree without having truly learned or somehow deeper dissected the colonial history of the topic of said degree – in Finland, but also in for example the great imperialist United Kingdom. (Procter, 2020) These tangled roots, like all colonial ourstories, need to be taken into account and interrogated, in order to move towards ethical practices that don’t rely on continued exploitation and silence of the contemporary agents within Egyptology and museums.

Sah

Sah (mummified human remains) were not one of the three chosen themes of the workshops held in Amos Rex. Firstly, because the workshops focused on objects, which human remains are not. And secondly, because the idea of addressing coloniality within an all-white group in the immediate presence of a deceased Indigenous body stolen from its homeland felt outrageous. Displaying *sah* in museums is a multi-faceted ethical problem, which connects to the complicated topic of repatriations and research (both cultural and medical research), but also to racism. Human remains are still treated differently depending on their origins, and the European history of Egyptian *sah* is particularly de-humanising. (Martin & Häggman 2020) If I were to make a continuation of this text, the topic of *sah* could perhaps be regarded more in-depth, but it is impossible to include this conversation shortly, hence I will only refer to *sah* through the conversations held by the workshop participants.

“Hi, were we supposed to meet in Zoom now?”
“...yes, I’ve been here for ten minutes?”
“So have I.”

“...”

“So, we are in different meetings.”

(text message between the writers)

DIARY OF A TIME TRAVELER, PART I

How it started

This work manifests through many different times and agencies. I want to map and inhabit the chronologies, ourstories, and the knowledge which have informed my process and methodological approaches, to practice dialogue with myself in the future. This is done by moving through and in different contemporalities and having discussions through multiple positions. This work is located within the intersection of multiple ourstorical and contemporary disciplines and modes of knowledge production, defying traditional quantitative research methods and easily traceable and reproducible processes usually required of academic work. My strategy has taken its form through assessing the site of inquiry, available time, access, as well as objects and concepts that resonated within my experiences as white researchers and educators. I shaped my strategy in relation to objects within Amos Rex's exhibition, which became the initial site of inquiry.

My preliminary interests and problem setting concentrated on the possibilities of decolonial work within the museum through the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition. Later this formulated into anticolonial work, but I have left the original wording in to demonstrate its evolution through the process. As the exhibition was already a reality and there were no possibilities of disruption or intervention, I wanted to instead take responsibility as a white researcher and museum educator, to look back and in retrospect challenge the assumptions, structures, and ways of thinking that contributed to the exhibition, question its colonial roots and continuations, and possibly affect future exhibition strategies of the museum. The integral concepts that informed my problem setting were colonialism, colonial logic and decolonisation, racism (and more accurately anti-Blackness and Islamophobia), white supremacy, and more language evading concepts like touch and grief – which all rose from the exhibition, its labels and architecture. As well as the three specific objects (which I could not stop thinking of) and their journey from ancient Egypt to modern-day Europe.

The Workshops

Through getting to know specific objects in the exhibition, and forming new relations to them and their ourstories, my case study became more action-oriented. I started to look for ways to include artistic research and art education practices into the strategy I was formulating. My primary points of reference were *Avaruusmatkalta Agoralle — Kuvataidekasvatuksen tila-aika-dikotomian haastaminen Muutto Oberoniin -installaatiotyöpajan tilojen analyysin kautta* (Heinonen 2019) and *Toisin katsoen, toisin tehden. Toisin katsottu museo ja queer-pedagogiset toimintatavat museoiden yleisötyössä* (Järvinen 2020). These works, both MA thesis' from the Aalto University Art Education programme, informed my ideas of workshop based study as well as working in a museum setting.

By engaging the museum staff in workshops, which explored the exhibition and ancient Egyptian artefacts through artistic praxis, I was able to bring together the exhibition space, agents from within the museum institution, and the objects that were originally robbed from graves. This facilitated a site of fermentation, which used artistic practice as a terrain for connections, new relations, and discussions. Through a safer space practise, guided artistic exercises, moments of submersion, discussions, writing, and reflection, the participants of the workshops were brought into contact with the boundary surfaces of subjects as dense as colonial ourstories and contemporalities, the museum as a site of grief, touch, destruction, and accountability.

My study process took place within three practice-based workshops in the Amos Rex art museum and the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition, through the month of January 2021, despite the restrictions implemented due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This imposed restrictions on the number of participants I could include in the physical workshops and how we interacted with each other throughout. The participants included representatives of the curatorial and conservations team, the public programmes team, the marketing team, and the technical team of the exhibition. The workshops were divided into three specific subjects, each taking a different thematic and practical approach to our research questions. The themes were as follows:

1. The fish-shaped palette

In the first workshop, we focused on one single group of objects, stone-carved fish palettes. We worked with raw material, to raise wonder about the material and how material becomes an object with its own ourstory and significance. The participants were invited to think through and with the fish palettes: where are their places of origin, who has touched them, what do they feel, what do they want, who misses them? These and other questions helped us bring the object into the centre of our understanding of ourstorical processes. We worked with themes of touching and the political nature it takes within the context of the museum and museum learning: who is allowed to touch the objects and how our understanding of the world is formulated through our skin.

This theme and choices of work methods rose from my personal encounters and reflections with the object. I had a need for touching it, writing to it and about it, imagining its own story and personality. I was rather obsessed with it, at one point. The fish-shaped palette made me question the lack of touch in museum spaces, and the diversity of touch: as a physical phenomenon and form of memory, but also as something mental, spiritual, cultural, and political.

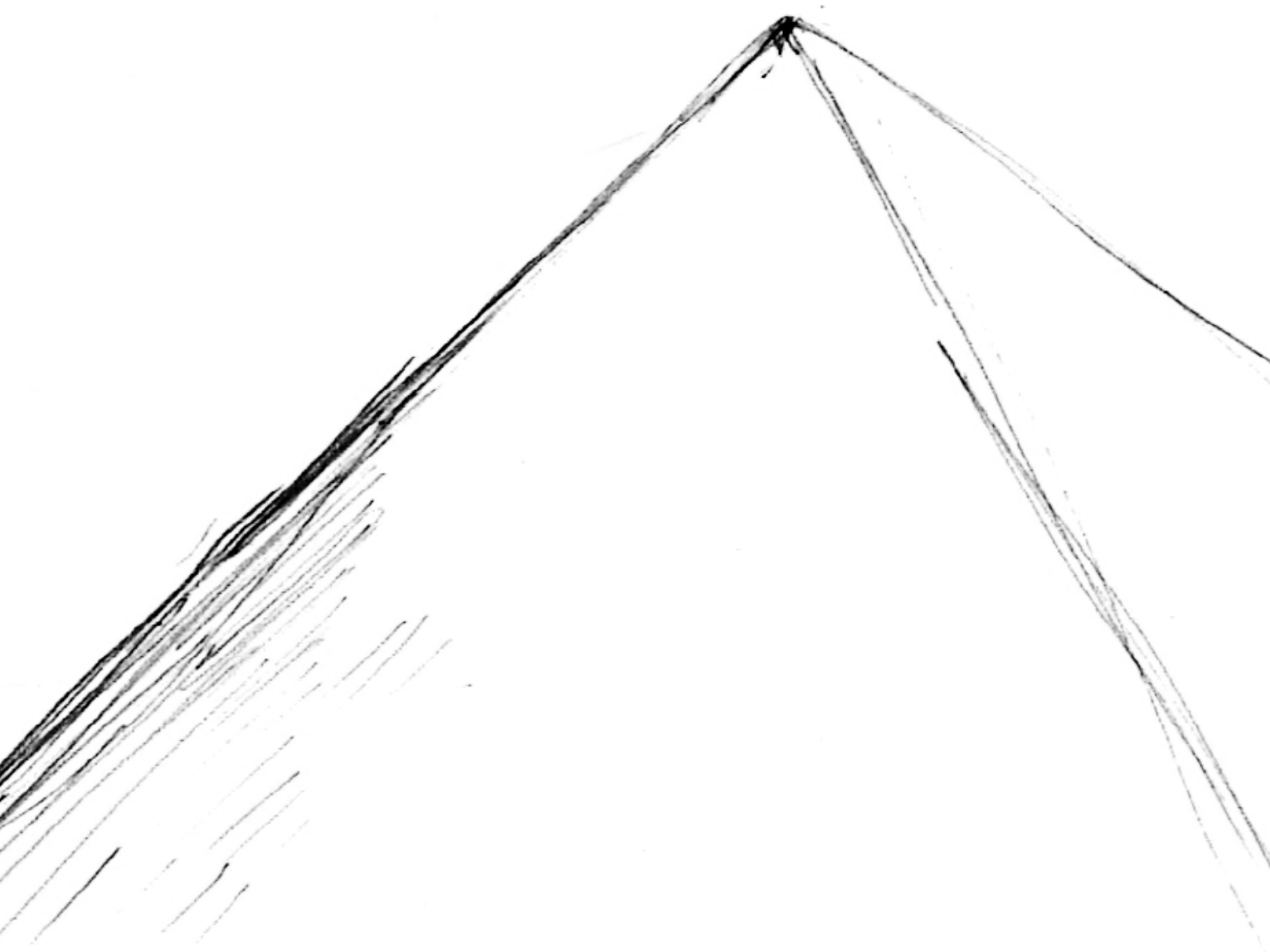
2. Sekhmet, the Goddess of destruction and healing

In the second workshop, I guided the participants to grieve the exhibited artefacts and the exhibition, in order to start the process of unlearning and repairing our humanity as descendants of colonialists. This was inspired by my own grief process, which began in the presence of a statue of the goddess Sekhmet, and my own letters and spells which I had written to her in my pain.

By spending time in and with the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition, the participants explored their own feelings and connections to the processes of colonial injustices. The participants were introduced to the notion of Sekhmet's duality as a goddess of destruction and healing and how that framework of thinking can be applied to our work within the museum institution. The workshop included writing texts and bringing a sacrifice to the statue of Sekhmet, in order to create a relationship with the representation of the goddess.

3. The Coffin of Henu, The King's only friend

The final workshop brought into discussion the topic of accountability and responsibility. Together, we explored the idea of ancient Egyptians seeing us through eyes painted on the sides of their coffins, and what responsibility that visibility would bring us. How can we work towards accountability within the Amos Rex museum? How can we do decolonial work that aims to abolish the museum institution as we know it? What would the ancient Egyptians think of us and the way we handle the objects stolen from their graves? The workshop continued the themes addressed before but aimed to synthesise them into an actionable plan for the museum's future and indent the community towards decolonial practice.



On Writing

The primary source of “data” was collected through my notes taken throughout the artistic exercises and discussions in the workshops. The participants were also encouraged to take their own notes and write about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Together these accounts and produced artistic works form a body of knowledge grounded in our own respective racial, cultural, and socio-economical positions within the structures of white supremacy, museum institutions, academia, and neo-liberal Nordic states as well as the specific situation of the workshops. The knowledge produced is porous and soft, hard to code, name, characterise or generalise, as usually expected from a qualitative study. In the space created within the workshops, it became possible to create data formulated from experiences, interpretations, reflections, affects and associations, new relations, and artistic praxis that moved beyond language. My analysis process reflects this amorphous nature of our body of knowledge, where the collected “data” is used more as material than evidence.

Avery F. Gordon writes about methodology: “Perhaps the key methodological question is not what method have you adopted for this research? But what paths have been disavowed, left behind, covered over and remain unseen? In what fields does fieldwork occur?” (Gordon 2008) This idea of the field, the ground of inception, of submergence, as the point of origin from which to imagine methodological approaches (or the disavowing of them) has been one of my key inspirations in this work. Instead of searching for methodologies to adapt or use to analyse the material collected from the workshops, I instead dove into it headfirst, to see what shapes the splash makes. Instead of applying a methodology into the text, the text itself becomes the methodology and tools to understand itself.

In the process of thinking through and with material produced in the workshops, I am relying heavily on the idea of Post Qualitative Inquiry outlined by Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre in her article *Writing Post Qualitative Inquiry* (2017). St. Pierre calls post qualitative inquiry an experimental, risky, and remarkable work that defies pre-existing methodological enclosures and cannot be controlled or measured with the same methods or processes as traditional qualitative research. (St. Pierre 2017) Calling for intensive reading and embodying the theories and theorists used within the process, St. Pierre puts forward the idea of writing as a form of inquiry. Moving towards something unknown, writing as thinking constructing and deconstructing itself, becoming something separate and self-realising. Writing brings forth knowledge that never would have existed without the process of writing itself. (St. Pierre 2017)

I aim to practice post qualitative inquiry by taking the body of various knowledge and experiences collected from the workshops and submerging myself into the process of writing my recollections of the workshops and the collected material itself. I interrogate the material, bring forth concepts and ideas, move through experiences, collect feelings and affects, imagine new possibilities, inhabit multiple temporalities, and shape a text that is at the same time a form of analysis, thinking, dialogue and artistic expression. This text will inform my understanding of the subject matter and the work’s possible results and continued iterations. By bringing the ancient Egyptian artefacts into relation to me within this process, I give them agency beyond just objects to be looked at. They inform my thinking, guide my processes, and live within my collective imagination. I work with a form of mapping, inhabiting, and searching, that tries to find ways to relate to the surroundings while being covered by forest. I taste and chew on words. Describe things. Let my feelings slip through the letters, see where they take me. I fill out spaces between each other’s words, react to each other, letting new sentences roll in the mouth like something warm and round and inexplicable. Inspired by the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, in which written spells became reality, to serve and protect in the afterlife. (Toivari-Viitala 2012)

The Timeline

To map my timelines, past actions, and groundwork, I want to give an account of the phases this process went through. Autumn 2020 was devoted to planning, reading, and writing a preliminary study plan and introduction to the work, as well as agreeing to conduct the workshops in the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition at Amos Rex. The workshops were executed on January 12th, 19th, and 26th. Before the workshops began, I sent out information to the participants, and in addition, asked for feedback after the workshops had been conducted. In February I analysed and reflected on the materials collected through the workshops and wrote the first rough outlines of this journal, logbook, or map. This outline was worked towards the finished text through March alongside the visual presentation.

A general written agreement consenting to the work was signed with the museum, as well as individual research agreements with the participants of the workshops, who were asked to consent for the use of their materials and discussions with the option of anonymity. Signing the agreement was voluntary and the workshops could be participated in without the agreement, in which case their material will not be included in the study. The agreements state our archive plan and consent to my rights to use the research materials also for further academic work.

Materials from the workshops were collected through writing, photographs, and other artistic methods such as clay. The materials collected in the workshops were documented and archived digitally on two (2) memory sticks, each residing with Kataja Ekholm and Melanie Orenius. Any other material was destroyed after archiving, including artistic material.

PART TWO

“Haha, oh no, look at this typo! Party one!”
“I love it, let’s just keep it.”

“...”

*“Then if you add another bracket to the third one,
we have a party tree.”*

*“We could really use a party tree
in this forest.”*

(conversation between the writers)

LETTERS FROM THE SEA

Before there was the forest or the journey to the sea, there were three objects that deeply affected me: a fish-shaped palette, a statue of the goddess Sekhmet and the coffin of Henu – the King’s only friend. Three objects that moved me, changed me, and awoke new knowledge in me. Three objects in the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition that gave me joy, love, sadness, and anger. The processes that began with the meeting of these entities, and searching for new positionalities, crystallised three individual themes that felt worth exploring in the context of a museum institution: **touch, sorrow, and accountability**. Through this part of the text, you will find how these themes connect to the objects, or rather the other way around.

The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition provided an example of the colonial history that stains all museum exhibitions, but which in other exhibitions are perhaps more “difficult” to excavate due to their contemporary nature and colonial tactics of hiding, fading, and disorienting. The *Egypt of Glory* exhibition and the sticky, stained ourstories of its stolen artefacts could work as a mirror to Amos Rex, which I wanted to polish and raise to the museum’s face in the workshops. Not one museum is free of white supremacy or colonialism, whether the items on display are stolen or not. I began to imagine possibilities of working with the individuals that make the exhibitions, policies, and public work, to excavate space for what I then called “decolonial” (anticolonial) work.

Out of these thoughts grew the idea of three workshops that would utilise art pedagogical methodology, in which I+I would work as the facilitators, co-travellers, and observers, but not as the teachers or experts. Unlearning and conversing together with the group of (white) professionals behind the exhibition: Curators, Head of Exhibitions, Egyptologist, Conservator, Head of Public Programmes, Public Programmes Producer, Head of Communications and Lighting Technician.

Each workshop was three hours long and each focused on one object and theme through art educational methods: working with clay, writing, drawing, creating gifts, and facilitating discussions around the objects in the exhibition. The workshops were to be conducted on three consecutive Tuesday afternoons when the museum would be closed from other visitors. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the group could be no larger than ten persons at the time, meaning that not all the participants were present in each workshop. I kept in contact with the whole group during the workshop weeks, making sure to be available and have material offered also to those who were not present on site. But whatever was produced individually online, or conversations held outside the workshops are not included in this text.

The workshops contained various exercises: individual, in smaller groups, and with the whole group together. When dividing the participants into several or two smaller groups, I only once mixed them intentionally, so that the teams within the museum would not be in their separate divided teams as usual. Otherwise, the divides were mostly based on which tables the participants happened to sit in that day. The numbered groups you will read about then do not comprise the same people in each workshop or exercise, but they are continuously mixed.

Within the following pages are fragments, letters, confessions, collections, offerings, and pieces that make up the body of learning that the workshops consisted of. I will outline the workshops, including the original plan and timetables for each workshop, how they were executed as well as reflections and reactions of the participants entangled with my own. During the workshops, I took notes, which these pages are filled with. Included are also excerpts from the participants’ own notebooks that I provided them with, and which the participants were free to use as they liked, with the knowledge that they were to be handed back to me by the end of the workshops. The workshops were held in Finnish thus the following materials have been translated from Finnish to English.

The form in which I chose to present the workshops in this work is by letters: messages from the journey that are meant to reach no one, or everyone, or anyone. They are letters to the objects as much as for us, an attempt to tell them what they inspired within me and in the workshops. So, imagine this address line: “to whomever it may concern,” and read them with the expectation of a long-lost lover or a sibling waiting for news from the other side of the world.



*“A desire to take the palette in my
hand and stroke its surface,
a finger across its edge.”*

(note by workshop participant)

DEAR FISH-SHAPED PALETTE,

I am writing this to inform you that the workshop group I told you about, in hushed whispers or maybe just in my mind, met for the first time on Tuesday 12.01.2021. I was excited and nervous because I knew no one and because I knew everyone. I breathed heavily into my mask while waiting for everyone to find their places, curious about where they wanted to seat themselves in the room. From which table, chair, or space would they feel comfortable to listen, to reach out, and to experience this new situation. When I felt that we were ready to begin, I stood up. I have attached the original timetable, safer space guidelines, and my reflections to this letter so that you can imagine what it was like, even though I know you were there for most of it.

The workshop plan and timetable

Opening of the first workshop, 30 min.

- Introducing the facilitators/writers, short introduction round of all the participants
- The agreements of consent
- The Safer Space guidelines and committing to them within the group
- Timetables and work methods of the workshops, i.e., the lengths of the exercises and breaks

The fish-shaped palette, 30 min.

- A written story about the fish-shaped stone palette is read aloud
- Group discussion

Break

Working with clay, 45min.

- Instructions to the exercise and handing out pieces of clay
- Working with the piece of clay in the exhibition space (separately in silence), moulding the clay in the presence of ancient Egyptian artefacts

Working with clay, part two, 30 min.

- Discussing the exercise, showing the works before the group, and sharing thoughts
- Sharing what kind of touch the maker would allow its own clay object
- Giving up the objects (to the facilitators)

Break

End of the first workshop

- Open discussion, how did the first workshop feel? Thoughts or questions?
- Some notes by the facilitators

Safer Space Guidelines

Participants were sent the guidelines via email before the first workshop and encouraged to comment or give additional suggestions to the list. As Safer Space guidelines are not an established set of practices yet, I used different sources to outline the ones used within the workshops. Notably, the guidelines used by Kaura Raudaskoski and Jemina Lindholm within their Queer/Crip themed guided museum tour in the Finnish Museum of Photography (Raudaskoski & Lindholm 2020) as well as the guidelines provided in the Safer Space Policy of Nurja Space (Nurja 2020). The guidelines were read aloud at the beginning of the workshop where there was also a possibility for comments and changes. Everyone committed to the original suggestions, which were as follows:

- This is a space of learning. We remember that everyone has their own starting point. We learn together and encourage each other.
- We respect and listen to each other. Everyone only speaks for themselves.
- We aim to use clear and understandable language. It is OK if not all terms are familiar to everyone.
- Questions, uncertainty, and incompleteness are allowed.
- You can always take a break when needed. We take care of ourselves and each other. We communicate clearly what we wish or need.
- We aim to not make assumptions about other people.
- If we receive feedback, we commit to examining it critically.
- If we feel irritation or aggression, we aim to examine the cause of this feeling.
- All feelings are allowed to be expressed, both negative and positive.
- Everyone can join in whichever way they like. Nothing is a must. We do not pressure each other into speaking or participating.
- We recognise our privileges and positions of power – and we are prepared for examining these in the workshops.
- We aim to be aware of how much space we take from others, and in what situations.
- Covid-19: we keep safe distances to each other, and kindly note to others whether we feel that the distances are too small. We use face masks.

In the Presence of the Fish-Shaped Palette

One of the oldest items of the exhibition was a fish-shaped palette, dating back to the Pre-Dynastic period. It was placed in a showcase with two similar fish palettes. In ancient times the palette was used as a plate for grinding colour pigments, and by its original placement in the grave near the deceased's face, this particular palette was likely cosmetic, i.e., a make-up palette. (Amos Rex 2020). Recent studies have found that these kinds of palettes were also used as musical instruments. The object fascinated me greatly, with its sympathetic looks and impressive age. But my greatest fascination rose from its smooth surface, carved from greywacke stone nearly six thousand years ago: whose hands have had the chance to hold this object during its time span? What has it heard and seen, and felt? What does it feel like? How does it feel?

It seems that one of the first things museum visitors are told is that touch is not allowed in the exhibition spaces. Touch is a threat: it can break something, taint it, ruin it, and bring it closer to decay. The natural grease in human hands can cause corrosion to irreplaceable objects or leave marks that cannot be cleaned. But if our skin, which is the human body's largest receptor of touch "[...] provides us with the means to connect with our surroundings" (Gallance & Spence 2014, 3), then is it not relevant to question whether one can truly connect with an object without touch – with connecting and understanding being one of the main curatorial aims in exhibitions? And does this simple questioning, in fact, tap into the very core of what makes museums such problematic institutions? Undead objects forced to be still in time, objects that have lost their original purpose?

Museums decide who gets to touch what, and in which manner. Regardless of the original purpose of the object, regardless of whose hands or eyes it was meant for. It is an act of power disguised as preserving cultural history, which of course is the current definition of museums – but not the original one. "I, the museum, own this item, hence I decide when and how someone can see or feel it". This is perhaps even more violent when it comes to the masses of objects held in museum storages – untouched, unseen, and even unstudied, the latter which rebukes museums' reasoning for keeping objects strictly in the hands of "professionals and researchers".

Touch

Touch is, from an able-bodied point of view, spread out everywhere in us humans. Skin is the human's biggest organ, which keeps us in touch with the world. Skin is the organ of touch, yet simultaneously touch has no specific organ of its own. In addition to physical touch, we can also be touched mentally. Furthermore, these different types of touches are often intertwined. Touch is a social construct, subjective, and becomes immediately more complex when humans touch each other. It is also a question of accessibility and consent. (Elo & Luoto, 2018)

From all these thoughts, from the intuitive need of touching an ancient fish-shaped palette, rose a written text through which I sought to connect with the palette and its ourstory, inhabiting it, living through it, and animating it. And while writing also questioning my rights to giving the object yet another story. The text came out of a newly born love for the object. Can caring for something mean that I am willing to destroy it? "If you love someone, you have to set them free", as the saying goes.

The following story was read aloud to the workshop participants, in the presence of the palette itself.

At first, there was only earth. Ancient. Solid.

Moving so slowly in time, that humans – those strange creatures – regarded it unmovable. Then there were hands. I had witnessed much pressure in my time, but this was different. I was separated from my core. I was beaten, shattered.

But the hands became delicate, the longer they worked on me. Became gentle. Until the mutilation stopped.

For the first time, I could see. My eye was tiny, but I had not had an eye before. I saw colour, and it was beautiful. I realised then that I was a tool, for creating even more colours. For painting humans. And they too were beautiful, in their own fragile ways.

At times I was beaten again. Differently from before. I did not have ears, but there was a vibration, echoing through me. And the humans danced, in their colours, to me. Their dark skin glowing in the warm light. There was laughter. And drinks. And love.

Then there was death.

I did not know death, for I am infinite. But humans do. As well as they know life. And they wanted me with them in death. And I was put in the grave, where it was dark.

I was back inside the earth, my origin. But it did not take long before I was picked up once more. With hands, those of an indescribable entity. Unlike human hands. I was carried to Duat.

There were gods. And I saw the stars from a place I did not know stars could be viewed. There was a river. It was the same river, which I had always felt so drawn to. For a long time, I wondered between this life and the afterlife.

Until, alas, there was light yet again. But bright, piercing. And even skin that was light. My colours would look very different on these humans, I thought, as they entered the grave.

I was moved, faster and further than before. The air changed. What had been warm and dry became cold and moist. The human hands. The hands that had moulded me. The hands that had made colours on me and given me sight. That had made music by me. Also became cold.

There was something familiarly ancient in that, which was now always wrapped around me. Bubbly, shiny, white as well. Touches grew rarer and different. Somehow distant, obstructed. Were they afraid of me? ---

And now I simply lie here, looking with my one eye. And the humans look back. Stare. How much time has it been?

They never touch me anymore, not truly. Never make colours on me. Never dance to me. There is neither earth nor stars. Nor gods.

I have not seen the river for so long, I have forgotten its calling.

Followed by this text, written by me and translated and read in Finnish in the workshop, came a long silence. After it had stretched over the space and participants, covering objects and massive installations that divided the exhibition space, I reached out with a question: “what did this awake in you?” The question blossomed into a conversation about stillness, objects, value, and *sah*.

Group Discussion

The participants seemed to have longed for talking to each other because the conversation did not stop once it started. Due to this, I did not intervene, even though there were many points in the conversation that I would have liked to linger on. It felt almost brutal to have to stop the discussion for the sake of the timetable.

The participants spoke of time, and how the text about the fish palette both seemed to bring stillness to this particular moment while simultaneously taking the listeners on a journey through centuries. They spoke of objects frozen in time, in museum spaces, and of the value of these objects. Who gets to touch them, who decides that, how are they touched and displayed?

“How can we possibly take each and every object’s history into consideration?”

“The object weighs so much, once you aim all your attention onto it.”

“Is the palette that important? Or is it similar to if I were to lose my keys, and they were found five thousand years later?”

“Objects don’t disappear, even though they are lost.”

“Humans have this strange need for gathering and storing things.”

“Who used to own a fish palette? It is also a question of societal class.”

“Who decides on what is collected?”

“Imagine losing something in a storage space, because there are just so many objects...”

*How should we look at these objects – or should we at all?
But they tell us so much – or do they?
Are we just filling out the gaps with our own information,
where are the other truths?*

(note by workshop participant)

Working with Clay

The clay exercise rose from my thoughts on touch, or the lack thereof, and of the memory of touch. Clay as material remembers which shapes it has been suggested earlier. It is also an ancient and natural material, making it the apparent choice of medium. Clay is malleable before burning, without consistent form or shape, ready to turn back to the matter it was separated from. Burning forces clay into separation, unable to be shaped or returned. The burned clay objects become undead the same way that museum objects do: through denial, separation, and control.

The participants were asked to take a slice of clay with them from the art workshop space, and to go stroll the exhibition whilst shaping the clay, in silence. Not necessarily thinking about the shaping, unless desired, but rather going by intuitive relation to the material. Was there perhaps an exhibited item which touch they themselves longed for, as I longed for the fish palette? Or was there an object that now spoke to them differently when entering the museum space with clay?

Part two of this exercise was to present the newly shaped pieces of clay before the group. I asked the participants to share with whom they would permit to touch their newly formed object, and how. For example:

I myself joined the exercise and created a clay object resembling a trumpet. Its function mimicked how I used seashells as a child – as many children are told, I was also told as a child that one could hear the ocean by pressing a seashell to the ear. The clay did not take this shape by plan, but through an intuitive shaping process, starting in the presence of an ancient Egyptian vase. Once I realised it had taken the form of a bowl, I decided to listen to it. And I heard the sea.

The clay then called me towards the coffin which *sah* had once been lost at sea, supposedly thrown overboard during its shipping to Finland. I listened closer. And I heard the voice of the lost *sah*. I heard several *sah*. The sea rushed through the clay and into my eardrum. I heard others too: enslaved bodies and refugees. I heard my grandparents and realised that although they drowned, their bodies were found and placed in a grave together, which I can now bring flowers to. There are so many bodies lost at sea, eaten by sharks, buried in pits – yet less of them are white, and this is of course no coincidence. I shared my piece of clay with the group, presented its function, and my wish that if someone was to touch my object, I would like them to use it in the same way: listening to the *sah* lost at the bottom of the sea. This was met by laughter from a workshop participant, which may have been laughter born out of nervousness, but that at this moment felt simply painful.

The other clay items made in the workshop, and their wished uses were:

Shabti

"I immediately knew where I wanted to go because I have had a strong need for holding a shabti in my hand. So I made my own shabti."

Hand

"I went to the little hand amulet straight away, but then I realised... that I can just copy the shape of my own hand... so silly."

A creature

"I just started thinking about all the beings or characters that have become divinities, and how someone has decided that they are holy now. I don't want my clay to continue existing, the idea that someone would find something I've made five thousand years from now terrifies me. No. I want to squish it before I give it away."

Ibi's lips

"One way of learning about ancient Egyptian art is to trace it, and that just doesn't work through pictures. So I traced various shapes of statues into this clay. There is an ear. And here is Ibi's lips. I'm quite proud of this. Ibi's lips are so beautiful and interesting. Don't destroy it!"

Funerary cone

"I don't know, it is an easy shape to make, a funerary cone."

Wrongly-placed plinth

"I have quite the opposite reaction regarding touch. I don't want to touch anything in the exhibition, because it's been my job to touch them. So I did this small plinth that is placed upside down, by mistake, in one of the showcases. It couldn't be corrected afterward, and it bothers me so much."

Inanimate object

"The clay felt like the same weight as a small animal, so I went to the animal mummies. Then suddenly the clay felt so alive, and the mummies very, very dead. Clay is like a wet mummy."

Hieroglyphs

"I made a plate of my clay, and wrote hieroglyphs on it like the ancient Egyptians used to write. If I were to give this to someone, I'd like them to continue writing onto it."

End of the First Workshop

After the workshop, I sent the group a body of questions that had arisen during the first exercises, but that time had not allowed me to share on-site. The list of questions included for example:

How do we separate an object from a museum object?

Do you note in yourself some form of escaping from accountability?

The objects of the exhibition were never intended for our eyes – what feelings does this evoke in you?

These questions were not homework, nor were they meant to be answered, but to be used as a tool for introspection during the coming week.

One of the questions was: *why is it allowed to laugh at sah?* A participant had written in their notebook later, that they think of humour as a coping mechanism. That when something is too horrible to comprehend, laughter helps. I agree, and physiology agrees, but I would have still liked to question whether there is another layer underneath the coping, something that could and should be revealed in order to create change? Is it possible to sit with feelings of horror and grief whilst coping? I have not laughed at my grandparents drowning, and I cannot laugh at the drowning of a *sah*, while I am aware it had been dead for thousands of years before its journey across the sea. As colonisers, enslavers, killers, and robbers have had no trouble coping in the past, perhaps the feelings of unease in the presence of lost *sah* should remain just that: uneasy. It is time the heirs of colonialism stop coping with the atrocities executed by their forefathers. These thoughts informed the exercises, discussions, and themes of the next workshop.

*How much does the museum storage differ from a grave?
(note by workshop participant)*

REVERED SEKHMET – GODDESS OF DESTRUCTION AND HEALING,

To She Who is Powerful, to the Red Lady, to the Lady of Terror and Life. I hope you are not cold without the fires of your temple or the heat of the desert created by your breath. I am not sure if you received my previous letters, pleas, or the spells I cast to call you. I am writing to tell you that I grieved for you, and for the actions that brought you all this way to Helsinki. I tried to guide others to grieve too, to lament and heal through the weight of the ourstories that are never spoken of. I offer you this account of the second workshop held on 19.01.2021, including our plans, reflections, and gifts to you.

The workshop plan and timetable

Opening of the second workshop, 20 min.

- Participants share their feelings and thoughts at the start of the workshop

Claim exercise, 1h

- The claim is read out loud in the exhibition space
- The participants are asked to take the claim with them and consider it in the presence of the exhibition objects
- The participants are also asked to write down their thoughts in private

Break

A gift to Sekhmet, 30 min.

- Exercise in pairs (four groups)
- What would you like Sekhmet to destroy and to heal, and what gift will you give her in return?

A gift to Sekhmet, part two, 30 min.

- The gifts are presented to the goddess statue

End of the second workshop

The Goddess

Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess of destruction and healing, pestilence and warfare, protected pharaohs and guided them onto the afterlife. Her priests were known as talented doctors and she was revered through gifts of wine and food, dance and music. According to the records in Amos Rex, the statue of Sekhmet exhibited “was discovered in the temple complex of Karnak, dedicated to Amun.” (Amos Rex 2020) Discovered in this context is slippery and obscure. Discovering happens when something was forgotten or hidden or never seen, waiting for the act of discovery, unearthing, finding, bringing back into the world. In the same way that some whole continents were “discovered”, the statue of Sekhmet was only discovered when it was laid upon by white eyes and white hands.

When I met Sekhmet for the first time, I fell silent in the buzzing exhibition hall of Amos Rex, in Helsinki in Finland. Three thousand nine hundred and nineteen kilometres away from her home. “She who is powerful” stood in the dark, without the fires in her temple or the priests that used to worship her. Still, I felt adoration, even devotion, and the need to apologise, to beg for the goddesses’ forgiveness and her mercy. I stood there for several minutes, gazing up at her, wondering if she could see me through her stone-carved representation. Standing there, in the controlled environment of the museum, I wanted to call on her, weave a spell that would pull her for the slumber she seemed to dwell in. These fantasies of a goddess returning began to intrigue me, to shape possibilities Sekhmet represented within our current context.

What Sekhmet represented in the world view of ancient Egypt, destruction and healing in the pursuit of justice or balance (Ma’at), is at the centre of the work that I believe we as a society need to accomplish in order to create better futures. Thousands of years after her followers have been buried in the desert she created, we² need to abolish systems of oppression and heal from the inhumane actions of our ancestors. So, I wanted to call on Sekhmet, weave a spell and give offerings to her, to bring her breath down on humanity once again. To burn and to soothe, to shatter and to mend, to destroy and to heal. To destroy for the sake of abolition, rebuilding, redistributing and reinvigorating, as the current systems of oppression and violence lie upon the world like a dead animal, unmoving and suffocating us all.

Grief

Grief was my first companion in the Egypt of Glory exhibition. It followed me when I wandered around the objects, which felt lonely and lost behind the sterile glass. This position of a griever allowed me the possibility to lament, to express feelings that connected to both my personal ourstories and the exhibitions past and present. Grief was my first companion, but only after meeting Sekhmet I started to regard it as a tool, as work towards accountability needed for anticolonial work to take root. Grief is a natural part of human experience, often evoking multitude of feelings including longing, anger, guilt and disappointment (Mieli 2015, 3), all of which are also intertwined with the complex experience of understanding privilege and one’s own position within the oppressive systems of modernity. Grief is regarded as something to survive or move through, but it has a significant meaning. Wright writes: “Grief is often thought of as a negative experience, but in fact it is the process by which people are healed and which helps them to emerge from a significant loss.” (Wright 2007, 9)

It is this healing and emergence that make the process of grief a possible tool in the work of repairing the broken humanity that we inherited from our ancestors. This broken humanity is the result of colonial exploitation and violence which underlay modernity and which required a fundamental

distance, separation from those oppressed. Even today we carry the legacy of this separation as formless guilt, feeling of disconnect and false innocence. Grief brings this broken humanity into view. Grief means staying with the pain and hard feelings, without a rush for solutions and explanations. Grief is a complex process we go through with our whole body, beyond the language that can keep us safe. We need grief to become truly accountable in our positions and our stories, as individuals and as communities.

Guided by these ideas about grief as a process of repairing our broken humanity and the fantasies of casting spells to call on Goddess Sekhmet, the second workshop focused on feeling, summoning grief into the shared space in order to become sensitive for the possibilities to lament and go through the multitude of feelings associated to the objects and their our stories. Taking into account that grief can be physically tiring and straining experience (Mieli 2015, 9) extra time was taken for grounding and creating an environment of safety and calm in order to make the exploration of potentially uncomfortable feelings possible.

A Claim

The second workshops, after everyone had settled into the new situation, started with the following claim, written by me and read aloud in the exhibition space:

I claim that our humanity is broken, defective and fractured. It is fractured because we have inherited it as such. We have inherited our broken humanity from our ancestors. It is part of our colonialist inheritance.

The violence of colonialism, the stealing of resources, and the oppression of people, exploitations, and killings demanded a distancing from our ancestors. A separation from our common shared humanity.

The logic of colonialism demands an "other", it demands a separation between the oppressor and the oppressed, which is based on ostensible inequality. Enslaved and racialised people carry with them the history of the enslavement of their ancestors and in addition still experience othering, oppression, and violence.

I claim that we, who have inherited whiteness and the invader's history, have inherited a broken humanity – and white privilege, which shields us from experiencing the brokenness.

I asked the participants to listen to the claim and try to study where in their bodies this claim manifested, and how it felt. I asked them to take it into deep consideration and to go walk through the exhibition with this claim in mind. I also asked them to consider grief during this walk and to make space in themselves for grieving that which our ancestors did not. The participants requested to hear the claim twice before beginning the exercise. I myself felt it resonating in my diaphragm, the same space that holds my feelings of anxiety and unease. I stood with it, continued breathing with this emotion, although my body alarmed me to run and hide, to crawl into a ball and shield myself.

As part of the exercise, the participants were asked to write about their experience and thought processes after their walk with the claim. For themselves only, or in their notebooks to share with me. Here follows some excerpts of the participant's notes:

“What does it feel like for the objects? Oh the horror, to be broken and faded of colours.”

“There probably wasn’t white privilege at the time these objects were made. Or was there?”

“About grieving for my forefathers: What were you thinking? Why did you have the right to take someone else’s history and treat however. Or to think that white is better.”

“I am protected by white privilege. I have to dig for the sadness because it doesn’t feel present (in this exhibition).”

“I kind of agree with the claim, but partly I don’t. History is Eurocentric. That creates our first problem. As if Europe is the only place where there has been any kind of progress.”

“When watching the National Museum of Finland’s sarcophagus: you should have deserved respect always. No plunder. No maltreatment. No othering. No being a curiosity.”

“Colonialism, climate change, inequality, harassment, hate. There are so many things that have gone wrong in this world. Why are we humans like this?”

“‘Humanity is broken’ is pretty well said. There are so many layers of deliberate and unintentional othering and violence. Maltreatment etc. Disrespect.”

“People are not broken, but the history of mankind is, and it creates problems and distorts our present time.”

“Ancient Egypt is a wonderful part of history. That is a fact. Full stop. But it creates a problem. Everyone wants it for themselves.”

A Gift to Sekhmet

The last assignment for the second workshop was to make gifts for Sekhmet, in smaller groups. This gift was to consist of two parts: an offering, something which the participants wanted to give up for Sekhmet to destroy, and a wish for something healed in return. The participants were encouraged to think through the theme of Sekhmet's divinity: destroying and healing as deliberate actions and frames of change. There were no material limitations to the gift, they could give something they made themselves (they were allowed to use any materials in the art workshop space) or an existing object they had with them. We ended the second workshop by presenting these gifts before the statue of the goddess.

Group one

Offering = Written notes, with words that they wanted Sekhmet to destroy. The words were *migraine*, *Covid-19*, *populism*, and *enemy*.

Wish = Written notes with wishes for; more information about the history of colonialism, by an expert, and more history lessons in schools.

All of these written notes were ripped in half and thrown on the ground before the goddess.

Group two

Offering and wish = Empty paper and a pencil, for Sekhmet, to write her own history, and to destroy the history distorted by white Europeans.

Group three

Offering = The cell phones of group three.

Wish = For Sekhmet to destroy othering and apathy, which are both enforced in the world through cell phones and social media.

Group four

Offering = Paper-cut snowflakes, placed on the four small pillars surrounding the statue of the goddess (holding the security string).

Wish = a cool breeze for the goddess in the heat.



“Apart from sorrow and shame, I also found feelings of relief – I am not alone. This is a collective trauma. A shared sharded pottery (?), although the cracks are of different shapes or lengths, depending on whether you have been born on the “side” of the oppressor or the oppressed. I look at objects, the objects look back – they contain power before which I can only become humble.

[...]

I would not be able to respect had I not been able to learn, read, see, know. And simultaneously I learn about myself. Of my prejudices, blindness, learned patterns, new possibilities, and of ways to do differently.”

(note by workshop participant)

TO HENU – THE KING’S ONLY FRIEND,

Where are you? Can you see me? I hope this letter finds you well. You will read that I regarded your coffin with the group of workshop participants on 26.01.2021. We sat next to your eyes for an hour, repeating your name, and attached are some of the conversations we held. I want to show them to you because if you heard us, you probably did not understand our language. And you deserve to know everything that is going on, these are after all your belongings, inspiring our thoughts. Your eyes, your pillow, your walking stick, and what should have been your final resting place. I am curious about your relationship with the king, but this we did not really discuss, in respect of at least some privacy – which has mostly been robbed of you.

The workshop plan

Opening of the third and last workshop, 15 min.

- How is everyone feeling?

Group discussions on accountability, 30 min.

- The participants are divided into two groups to discuss accountability

Break

Henu’s coffin, 45 min.

- A guided conversation about Henu’s coffin, and about the space in which the coffin is displayed

Accountability discussion, part two

- What did the different groups discuss during this day’s first exercise?

Break

A decolonial action, 20 min.

- In small groups, discuss one decolonial action that could be or could have been done in relation to the Egypt of Glory exhibition (the deed can be realistic, but it doesn’t have to be)

Final discussion, end of the workshop series, 40 min.

- What did the groups come up with in the decolonial action exercise?
- Discussion on the experiences of the workshop series as a whole

Through the Eyes of Henu

Ancient Egyptians believed in Duat*, the afterlife. Death as most modern humans deceive it today, did not exist. There was not a word for dying, as one was just assumed to travel to live on in Duat once the final breath in the earthly body was drawn. (Meri 2021, personal communication) Hence mummification was invented, as a way of preserving the body well for the afterlife, and hence the graves were filled with riches and practicalities meant for the continued life. That is if the one being buried could afford it.

In the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition sat a rather small rectangular wooden coffin from the era of the Middle Kingdom. The coffin has a pair of eyes painted on its left side, through which it was believed that the deceased could view the outside world from the afterlife. This coffin belonged to Henu – The Sole Companion of a King. The exhibition label read: “The term [sole companion of a king] probably referred to Pharaoh’s trusted courtier, but its exact meaning is not known.” (Amos Rex 2020) The direct Finnish translation leads as “the king’s only friend”, which I grew fond of.

Henu no longer resides in his coffin. His other belongings were also scattered in the exhibition: his headrest, upon which he had once laid his head and dreamed, where all his thoughts had rested, and his walking stick that had been used so efficiently that it had ancient finger-marks engraved into its wooden surface. Henu seemed like a ghost, present everywhere, yet nowhere to be found.

The eyes of Henu’s coffin became a symbol of examining the world today. What would Henu think if he saw me? The world? Amos Rex? Would he be proud or ashamed? What would he think of his belongings taken from his grave and placed in separate showcases? Do I have the right to consider the world through Henu’s eyes, or is this exactly how it should be viewed? I wanted to use the eyes of Henu as a mirror to the workshop participants. Could the eyes work as a tool for seeing that which is hidden and protected under white privilege? That which is given meaning and being reasoned for in the name of research and academia.

I used a practice borrowed from the Visual Thinking Strategies method of viewing art, which focuses on making the conversation about an artwork or object inclusive, and not based on the viewers’ previously learned information. (VTS Suomi ry n.d.) This method also strips the facilitator of the role as the “expert” and is a method being widely used in museum pedagogy. Some of the workshop participants knew nothing about Henu’s coffin from before, whilst some were even able to read the hieroglyphs on its side. I wanted to first study the coffin, by simply being in its presence, without “information”. And to then turn the look towards the participants themselves, using a similar approach of examination.



The Conversation

Below are some excerpts from the conversation held in the presence of Henu's coffin.

Question:

Let us examine this coffin together, what do you see? There are no right or wrong answers.

Answers:

"The coffin has darkened corners. Who and how many have carried it with their bare hands? The corners have darkened from the carrying. Like the walking stick of Henu, which has his thousands of years old fingerprints still visible."

"The coffin has been damaged by moisture."

"Some of the wooden creases look like they have been painted on, is it actually a wooden coffin? It seems that it is."

"The eyes seem guarding as if they are saying 'don't come closer'."

"But the eyes also look gentle. Where are the eyes looking, towards the ceiling? It is not like Mona-Lisa, whose eyes follow you wherever you go."

"Hieroglyphs, and you can see the guidelines of the hieroglyphs, which is rare."

"Some of the hieroglyphs look just like modern emojis."

Question:

What do you think the coffin sees, through its eyes?

Answers:

"If he is looking upwards, he can see the lights and technical equipment of the museum."

"We are talking about Henu, but he cannot understand our language (Finnish)."

"He would like that his name is mentioned so much, because in ancient Egypt that would mean that he is now immortal."

"Is he missing company? All his belongings are scattered around. Where is Henu himself?"

"Can he be in the afterlife, if all his belongings are here in the museum now? If his things are not with him in the grave, has he lost them in the afterlife as well?"

"Henu should not be able to see us, and we should not be able to see him. He was meant to be in a grave."

"The coffin is now a museum object, not a coffin anymore."

"Henu would probably think that we are wearing very little jewellery, but that we are rich nonetheless, because of all our clothing."

We compared the ideas of having our own ancestors shown as museum objects but also discussed that this comparison is problematic. It may seem like an easy way of finding understanding, to consider one's own relatives exhibited in a museum. But these exhibited bodies, the *sah*, and their heirs regardless of how distant have not had the luxury of considering these thoughts. When regarding *sah* we are not discussing white European bodies, but Indigenous North-African bodies, taken from their origins and placed under our eyes for curious contemplation, and for us to learn more about death. As white Europeans, we cannot compare how we would feel – because we cannot know. Our ancestors have not been stolen from us and put on display on another continent, and we have not been continuously dehumanised and racialised like these very same living Egyptian ancestors still are today. We may perhaps use this imagined reality to seek empathy, but it is not to be used as a way of justifying the exhibited *sah*.

The *sah* in the next room suddenly felt burningly present. And again, so did the path through which they had been transported to Amos Rex, to Museo Egizio, across the sea.

Accountability

The final workshop started with dividing the group into two and asking them to have a conversation about accountability. I did not give them any more specific instructions, because I wanted the participants to have their own processes regarding the word. The discussions were intense, and again, nearly hard to end when the time came. I asked the groups to share their thoughts only after the discussion with and about Henu's coffin, in order to possibly steer the conversation towards the accountability I was interested in discussing.

The participant's notes on accountability entangled into the conversation about Henu. We also briefly spoke about the responsibility we have towards each other, as co-workers and as peers. And about shared responsibility versus being the one who makes the final calls of certain decisions.

*What if my father's coffin was here, and no one would have asked me about it.
Maybe it would be good if we would learn from it.*

(note by workshop participant)

No one ever asked me about working with the mummies. The public was given content warnings, but not the person expected to actually touch and smell them. The one who was meant to welcome the bodies and place them in their new temporary showcases.

(comment by workshop participant)

A Decolonial Action?

The final assignment in the series of workshops was to think of a decolonial action that Amos Rex could do or could have done, regarding the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition. The participants were divided into groups for this discussion, and I encouraged them to think of something realistic or unrealistic. This was the first time I actively chose the word *decoloniality* when addressing the group.

Group one

“We could have opened up the theme and topic of colonialism, better and more concrete to the audience, through its own exhibition section for example. One or more Egyptian Egyptologists could have been present somehow. Colonialism could even have been one of the main themes of the whole exhibition. We could have also opened the history of Museo Egizio more for the audience.”

Group two

”If we were to make this exhibition again next year, we would certainly bring colonialism into it in another way. But our group started thinking about what could still be done. And we would like to write a kind of statement about what we have learned when making this exhibition, to make our process transparent to the public. Reveal what professionalism in a museum is, what choices we have made and why etc. This could maybe encourage other museums to do the same.

We could make a list of the things that we only learned afterward. Now that we do know new things it is our responsibility to still share them with our audience somehow. Maybe through our website or on social media? We think our audience and followers are interested in us being honest.

Another thing would be to open up what we have learned about content warnings and why we make them. It turned out that people consider them very differently.

Group three

”Same thoughts as group one. We started thinking about this thematic too late, at the point when it was more a question of reaction and living with the decisions we had made, as there was no longer time to take it (colonialism) into the planning of the exhibition. Another thought we had was that all the texts could have been available in Arabic. Could the exhibition have been made available to Egyptians in Egypt somehow as well? We couldn’t think of how.”

Group four

”Similar thoughts to the previous groups. The history of Museo Egizio should have been more transparent. We should have had a more straightforward conversation about this with them, we don’t really know how they (Museo Egizio) relate to their museum’s history. The provenience information should also have been made available in the exhibition.

Amos Rex had the idea of a podcast episode earlier, addressing the colonialist history of Egyptology, as an addition to the series of podcasts that we have made. But we got stuck with who should or could be the one speaking about this topic.”

*“Hey! I found that quote by Fromm that I was looking for earlier:
‘To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born,
and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime.’”*

(text message between the writers)

The End

At the end of the final workshop, I asked the participants to share thoughts on their experiences and to give possible feedback to the facilitators. Below are some excerpts.

“Taking this time has been important. It would be good to have this time at the beginning of an exhibition project. To have facilitated conversations and a chance to work on the topics.”

“Three hours per workshop felt like a good time.”

“I’ve learned more about my colleague’s professional roles.”

“Now would be the time to start this conversation regarding next year’s exhibition, so that it has time to be taken into consideration in the planning. So that we can consider the contents together.”

“The workshop structure was a good way of working around these topics.”

“There has been too many practicalities and deadlines (in making the exhibition), no time for pausing.”

“One can’t manage alone.”

“In the beginning the assignments (of the workshops) were confusing, but then they allowed pausing, which helps in having a conversation. There was no need for having more prepared conversations.”

”I feel hopeful working in Amos Rex, that there is an ability to listen here, and respect. Like we can learn and unlearn as long as we stay active.”

“The safer space guidelines had an impact on the atmosphere and how to be in the space.”

*“I want to know, even though it hurts. I
want to learn, even though it is hard.
It is the only way to do things differently.”
(note by workshop participant)*

PART THREE

DIARY OF A TIME TRAVELLER, PART II

Dear Kataja and Melanie,

Since I have already travelled through multiple timelines and chronologies, interwoven ourstories, personal stories, and formalised accounts, from ancient Egypt to the birth of museums, back to the present day, and perhaps even glimpsing into the future – it now seems only natural to continue disregarding the conventional timeline. I have written letters to fish palettes, goddesses, and painted eyes. Now, I feel obligated to write to myself, in the past, at the beginning. Much has happened in this learning process since last autumn 2020 when it started, and I would like to reflect upon that in this final letter, written in the spring of 2021. This is to you, Kataja and Melanie of the past (pre workshops), from me, today’s Kataja and Melanie (post workshops). Let me tell you what happened, or at least how I remember it.

I am writing this from the forest. From under the cover that has twisted the landscape, transformed my positionality in both space and time. I am adrift, lost, and dizzy. I am writing to myself in the past and to others in the future. I had many ideas at the beginning of this project, before realising how the terrain had shifted. I am now taking a look at what happened in the workshops, with the agents from the Amos Rex art museum, and what became possible through them: ideas, experiences, affects, chafes, and resistances. I am not speaking of results or effects, as this work resists clear lines, categories, and answers. It is made of lingering, haunting, uncomfortable, and formless parts that stick in the back of the skull or itch just behind the ribs.

You asked some questions at the beginning. Part of them continue to guide me until this day, yet many of the questions now feel misplaced, misworded, or otherwise irrelevant. I will however aim to answer them between the lines of the following pages because I know you are curious. Did I succeed in our endeavours? I know you thought from the very beginning, that all this would be a mere drop in the ocean of work – if even that. But I would like to have faith in that drop, and you should too. Hope is a valuable tool, and failure along the way is part of the process.

I will now partly step out of my defiant “I” to inhabit the “we” that I have wanted to resist. I am doing it to create space for the community that was built, and to respect the process we went through together with the workshop participants, without making distinctions of separation or creating false notions of difference. I was not a bystander or just an observer, but a willing and active participant and facilitator. “We” is also the omission of belonging to the structures that we worked within – the Amos Rex art museum and Aalto University. We are everything we represent, inhabit, and act upon in the world. And we started with the objects.

At First

First, there was a fish-shaped palette, a story, and a silence. A silence stretching over the exhibition space, which was without the soundscape designed for it. We could sit in silence because there was no one else present, a sign of our collective privilege through which we got to see and inhabit the exhibition space in the middle of a global pandemic – when others had to stay home. The silence was broken by a question, followed by a discussion about time, objects, and meaning. In giving one of the objects a personal story, memory, and journey, the weight of the centuries could be felt more tangibly: if every object in the exhibition could tell their own story, about their journey from when being made to sitting still in the museum display, could one person comprehend all of them? Or would we be crushed under that weight?

This may have been the first time that the vastness of the exhibition was truly felt among the group of exhibition makers. *Egypt of Glory* hosted 400 items on display, and we had just spent an hour, easily, in the presence of a rather aesthetically mundane stone object. Comparing this amount to the 40 000 artefacts in Museo Egizio's collection, truly gave a new perspective of the numbers in the lists of objects.

Focusing on the fish-shaped palette there were also questions of its value. Is it really that valuable? Is it that important? We made comparisons to our contemporary reality and the abundance of objects we possess. We imagined our own objects after thousands of years, the legacy of fossil fuels and plastic in the hands of those who will live after us. In the museum, the object becomes an artefact and loses its context as a utensil, something that was used and regarded through that usage. We found in ourselves the notion of becoming distant from the objects we use, and how sad it is that we do not have more personal relations to our object realities. We could feel something through the story of the fish palette, told as if through the palette itself, in a world where we are surrounded by expendable objects.

The discussions of objects both in our possession and within the exhibition led us to a path that delved deep into the collections of museums. The objects on display are only a fraction of the hoard that exists within the collections of museums throughout Europe and beyond. Objects that were taken from the darkness of graves to be placed in the darkness of storage halls, never regarded nor studied, just being possessed and kept. Many of these objects are “lost”, as they are never catalogued or published, they just sit in anonymity. This is indeed rather peculiar, considering that museums, Archaeologists, and Egyptologists use the very specific term of “finding” when excavating an object. Always underlining who the great hero was, who “found” a buried grave, which was in fact made for hiding and preserving.

When making an exhibition or when objects are needed in a study, the decisions about which objects are displayed or taken from the storage are made by a few individuals. These people shape our collective understanding of the ourstory and narratives of ancient Egypt, by deciding what is regarded as worthy of study and display. During the first workshop, we also shared and considered an urban legend of a *sah* that was supposedly lost in the collections of the British Museum (which houses over six thousand human remains). This tied into all the other stories of *sah* being disregarded, forgotten and disposed of, thrown from ships into the sea or otherwise forgotten.

In the context of objects and their stories, *sah* felt out of place. The remains of Indigenous dead in any other context would not be spoken of as objects but as what they are: human remains, corpses, and bodies. *Sah*, in contrast, can be lost within the depths of a museum collection or displayed without a head in the exhibition – without question. In the ourstory of Egyptology and the Egypt-mania that followed the “discovery” of Ancient Egypt, *sah* could be thrown into the sea when the weight of their death was too much for the ships carrying them.

The discussion we had next to the fish-shaped palette was our first attempt at creating space for more object-based understanding and highlighting the colonial ourstories that the exhibited artefacts hold within them. Through our inquiry into the meaning of objects, we still held on to the familiar: our roles, our environment, and our own understanding, limiting our imaginations to the ourstories of the objects that surrounded us. This is, of course, a very expectable starting point, as all journeys start from under our own feet. To shift this ground under us, to find new paths and unexpected things under the foliage, we approached the objects through touch. We did not touch the actual artefacts, as it would have meant the end of our access to the museum. Instead, we took clumps of clay into the exhibition space and warmed it in our hands while looking at the objects.

Through the clay and our eyes, we tried to connect with the objects in a new way. Our hands moulded the clay as our eyes moved on the surfaces of coffins, amulets, statues, and miniatures.

How can artistic methods and practices work as a support to decolonial work within the Amos Rex art museum, and create a space for unlearning, joy, wonder, and grief, in order to move towards accountability and decolonial action?

How can arts-based workshops support discussions on decolonial actions within the Amos Rex art museum, which are rooted in an object-based understanding and unlearning dominant language that distances us from the colonial histories of taken ancient Egyptian artefacts?

How can arts-based workshops bring us closer to ancient Egyptian artefacts and the process of decolonising our understanding of these objects within the Egypt of Glory exhibition in the Amos Rex museum?

How to create a space for an object-based understanding of colonial histories and ancient Egyptian artefacts, like the fish palette, in order to imagine decolonial futures for the Amos Rex art museum?

By moulding clay within our hands, we created small, temporary objects that reflected our experience within the exhibition space. Among other things, there was a small hand, a chimaera, a funerary cone, a shabti, a plate of hieroglyphs, and a horn that resembled a seashell. Someone remarked that the clay “weighed like a small animal”. The weight of a life. For someone else, the clay had the weight of a wet *sah*. Again, the thought of a *sah* at the bottom of the sea was felt within the controlled and dry space, as the horn-like seashell was made, listening to them in the depths. With the lost *sah* close to us, we ended the first workshop.

“Should we escape to the sea?”

“Yes we should. To Egypt.”

“Let’s go now.”

(text message between the writers)

Then

In the second workshop, we were seeking the connections between grief, accountability, and colonial ourstories. To understand the aims of the workshop, we need to bring into discussion the ideas that informed it, mainly the notion of the logic of coloniality and the idea of a broken humanity of the descendants of colonial power. This is also where the forest shadows start to grow longer, where the trees have teeth and grass is hungry, the place of realisations and possibilities of incompatibility between museums and decolonisation.

In her article *Sites of unlearning in the museum* (2018) researcher Nancy Jouwe states that decolonial thinking “functions as a critique of the hegemony of Western imperialist thinking and its continuation in our current-day institutionalised lives.” (Jouwe 2018) In the article, Jouwe outlines the interconnectedness of coloniality, the mindset and logic of colonialism which survives without active colonialist occupation, and modernity as being part of the same phenomenon of the West creating alterity or difference with “others”. In the dual function of coloniality and modernity, modernity is only possible through a continued appropriation of land and bodies, as well as exploitation, pollution, and corruption which were established in the process of colonisation. In the constellation of coloniality/modernity racism, environmental destruction, and disregard of human lives are not aberrations but intentional parts of the same system of power. (Jouwe 2018) The white national state relies on museums, universities, and other institutions to function to reproduce ideas and visualities about a reality that affirm these existing power structures of coloniality and hide the violence of modernity.

Jouwe presents that decoloniality happens in the openings of the system of coloniality/modernity as changes to show an alternative to modernity and to dismantle the completeness of this system that presents itself as universal. The decolonial work in the museum then starts by looking at museums as sites of the subjectivity of the West that consolidates European culture, national state, and memory as expressions of the Western self. (Jouwe 2018) In the institution of the museum, the logic of coloniality functions in centring whiteness while hiding, dehumanising, appropriating, racialising, and exploiting “others”. Following Jouwe’s thinking, there can be no decolonised museum, as museums are sites of deeply ingrained white supremacy that uphold violent modernity and continued oppression of Black and Indigenous peoples. To work towards decolonisation within a museum is to work towards abolishing the very institution you work in, and the structures that you rely on to uphold your power and privileges.

Biologist, anthropologist, and sociologist Shay-Akil McLean describes decolonisation as a painstaking, uncomfortable and messy process that is defined by the making of ourstory through struggles, strategies and tactics. In his article *Decolonization: What Ought To Be* (2017), McLean points out that decolonisation does not mean ‘diversity’ but radical examination of one’s own relative social position, privileges and power to create interactions which are not based on denying someone their own self-determination. (McLean 2017) Decolonisation means moving towards returning the lands that have been stolen from Indigenous peoples and confronting settler capitalism which is tied to our ideas of modernity. It is not a metaphor or language tool but a practise of active resistance and disobedience that seeks to heal, build different relations, and work towards an alternative world.

McLean proposes that decolonisation is a process in which there is a need for different revolutionary tasks for people who have been colonised and for those who are the descendants of colonists and beneficiaries of white supremacy. For those colonised, there is a need for revolution to claim back land and resources stolen from them. For the settlers/colonisers and their descendants, there is a need for “social revolution to repair their own humanity.” (McLean 2017) The violence of colonialism, and later the very idea of modernity that was achieved through it, meant that our ancestors

impaired and buried parts of their own humanity in order to exploit, kill and enslave Indigenous populations and exploit their resources for exponential growth and “progress” of modernity. This process of alienation, distancing and othering was done simultaneously in political, social, artistic, and scientific contexts through violent actions and the use of dominant language. The logic of coloniality keeps our humanity impaired. The idea we explored through our workshops in Amos Rex was if we can create openings, cracks, and twists into this logic and the safety of dominant language by working through grief. To achieve this, we confronted the idea of our broken humanity, and then we made gifts for the goddess Sekhmet.

How to hold a space within our knowing for both ancient Egyptian magic and violent colonial histories, without reducing ancient Egyptian culture to the violence of our ancestors?

How to practise grief before the statue of Sekhmet, and use that grief to guide people with colonialist/settler ancestry towards repairing their humanity?

In the first part of the second workshop, we listened to a claim and explored the possibilities to feel grief within the presence of the stolen objects. This exercise of grieving had the aim of unravelling the distance created by language and the act of knowing itself. A common remark during the workshops was this very idea of distance: between Ancient Egypt and us standing in the museum is an incomprehensible abyss of time, decay, and fission. It became evident, however, that this distance could be crossed from the other extremity to another with a single remark or sentence, passing through thousands of years with the certainty of knowledge. We could speak about Ancient Egypt as something *known*, as something certain and clear with its curious beliefs and strange gods. It is the abyss that stretches between us that we find so hard to traverse.

This distance, which inhabited the discussions throughout the workshops, is not just an empty space of time. The ourstorical, temporal distance between ancient Egypt and current fossil capitalistic contemporality has been colonised and re-imagined through fiction and the practices of Egyptology. Ancient Egypt, as it lives in the western collective cultural imagination and visual lexicon, is not only a historical place that exists in time but also a mythical place that exists separate from reality. The creation of this mythical ancient Egypt was made possible by ruthless colonial violence and exploitation in the African continent, which has enabled the artefacts of ancient Egypt to be stolen, often under state-sanctioned legitimacy, and displayed in museums and collections throughout Europe. The undead artefacts move around the world in different museums to be displayed, mostly without any self-critique from the institutions themselves. So colonial ourstories survive in the logic of coloniality and are entangled with the present state of capitalism and our dependence on fossil fuels and plastic.

The time taken within the workshops were a form of self-reflection, disruption and forced stagnation. Museums, like many contemporary institutions, are busy in the fundamental sense that we are all busy in the never-ceasing demands of the capitalistic society. By just taking time, there was space to stop and look around, to wonder and to feel. In the safety of these workshops, in the presence of the undead objects, there was space for reflection usually not granted within the tight exhibition schedule. We shared thoughts on how difficult it is to grasp something that has happened so long ago and to find the paths that lead to us, to our lives. It was easier to imagine connections to ancient Egyptian characters or stories, than to the colonisers of some mere hundred years ago. Many of us shared experiences of ambiguity, uncertainty, and tangled terrain when trying to connect to the ourstories of colonialism and exploitation. Connecting the horrid actions of colonisers and “explorers” to oneself, in order to take accountability, was difficult. We have not personally taken these objects, nor have our parents or grandparents – but we do still benefit from their actions, sharing our white European heritage and ourstory, and upholding it within the museum structures today.

Grieving, staying in this abyss between the fascination and the fascinated, the explored and the explorers, was something we were mostly not yet ready to practise. The idea of objects as something feeling, or something we could feel for, was alien and disturbing. We could start to sketch the outline of our ourstories, to map the edges of the abyss, but we did not let ourselves get lost. We held on to our innocence, the distance of time, our role, and our knowledge. We found it difficult to grieve or focus on the horrors of the past when in the presence of the artefacts themselves. They were intriguing, beautiful, and breath-taking, there is a reason for their endless fascination, and it is tangible in their presence. It was never our intention to minimise these objects and their ourstories into the violence of our ancestors but to make space for more. More questions, more uneasy realisations, more haunting voices and the uncertainty of the abyss between.

At the end of the second workshop, we offered gifts to the statue of goddess Sekhmet. After exploring the possibilities to relate to the objects through grief, the moment we offered the gifts to Sekhmet was unexpectedly tender, emotional, and buzzing with a new sort of energy. The act of having to bow before the statue, to present her with a physical gift and ask for a blessing in return, broke the purpose of the museum space and Sekhmet's role as just an object. It became a new sort of action – not looking nor listening to a guided tour, or even taking notes or drawing. In a way, at that moment, we gave the power back to Sekhmet. Begging for her mercy. We gave her snowflakes, phones, drawings, and other objects, asking her to destroy what is in the way and to heal that which is impaired.

We also shared aloud an example of how we had failed in making the exhibition: in not providing the visitors with transparent information about Museo Egizio and the “origins” of the objects' journey to Europe, and then to Helsinki, and of the complex ourstories connected to the objects. In the presence of Sekhmet and the undead objects, this admission felt important. Museums are institutions of stability and project knowledge. There is little room for cracks, crevasses, and leaking walls. In the process of producing this knowledge, however, the institution often reduces the objects exhibited to only their appearance (see Procter 2020, 69-71) and excludes the multitude of ourstories and meanings held within each individual. Procter presents that some objects refuse to be constricted by these processes, instead, they become unruly and disobedient, breaking the rules the museum sets. (Procter 2020, *ibid.*) We believe the admission made in the presence of Sekhmet was in part due to this disobedience. The undead object refused to be simplified and reduced, instead, forcing us to acknowledge its multitude and complexity and in turn our failure of portraying it.

And Lastly

The final workshop held within it a gaze. This gaze originated from a wooden coffin, which had eyes painted on its side. These eyes were a device for the dead to see through into the world of the living. After we had started the final workshop by discussing in groups the meaning of accountability in our work within the museum, we settled ourselves in front of the gaze of Henu, the King's only friend. Even though the coffin was empty, its eyes still had weight. In the discussions surrounding Henu's coffin, we encountered a surface, or crust, which felt nearly impossible to pierce through. This surface was our collective whiteness and privilege, our perceived innocence and distance to the objects, our motivation to do good as professionals. We discussed accountability and returned to our thoughts on the *sah* on display. But recognising our own whiteness aloud or recognising that the question of bodies in museum spaces is also connected to racism, did not become an open topic of conversation until the very end of the discussion.

How can painted eyes on the side of an ancient coffin work as a tool for discussing accountability and responsibility of the museum, in relation to ancient cultures and colonial histories?

We used Henu's eyes to look at ourselves, to look at the present and into the future, and to consider what Henu would see and think about today's society and being in Finland. By at first studying the object carefully through our own eyes, it was then not a very difficult task to imagine the view reversed. Much easier than the attempt at seeing the objects as living creatures, with their own ourstories and rights, which we aimed to do in the first workshops. Shared humanity with Henu gave us more imaginative space to connect through time, to think through the eyes that were fixed on us through the wooden surface. We could hold within the conversation the idea that we must be strange for Henu, our clothes, our language, the lights, and the sounds. We made comparisons to us and our coffins, living with dead relatives in Holland and the body of Lenin.

In front of Henu, we shared thoughts about accountability. The shape our accountability took was the shape of knowledge and information. The responsibility to provide accurate information, structured knowledge, and transparent processes. Our accountability was connected to the law-mandated role of museums, of translating ourstory and keeping memories, to connect to visitors and make sure we do not cause harm. The accountability of the museum was seen to reach into many directions, from the past and ourstories, to the present and the people hungry for knowledge and to the future and those who would otherwise forget. There was also an omission: museums are not institutions free of ourstory or separate from society. Museums carry hundreds of years of exclusion, othering, and exploitation. This ourstory and the role of museums need to be challenged in order to renew the institution and make progress.

In the name of this progress, we ended our workshops by imagining ways that could have an actual impact within the museum. These initiatives reflected the participants' experiences and professionalism, focusing on information provided, text choices, and public communication, but not really imagining changes to the structures or resources of the institution. Our imagination was limited to the unmovable weight of the current reality. The actions imagined were relying on the continuity of work and resources of the participants, as it is harder to imagine futures of abolition and radical change where your own continuum is disrupted, unsure and shadowy.

This is a part where I betray the “we”. A knife appears from the folds of a cape. Flesh is cut. The point of no return before the final act. But the knife is a prop, the flesh is just soft red velvet. My betrayal is mild and theatrical. I cut myself away to better perform the role required of me in this work, not by me, but by the university that I am performing in. To discuss the workshop with critical separation. This is, as previously stated in this work, imagined separation and a liar’s distance, but it will allow me an opportunity to outline and reflect the overall outcomes of the workshops.

In the end, we discussed our feelings and experiences, and I shared that I at times had experienced frustration. It seemed that conversations often ended and moved on to the next with the words “it’s complicated” or “it’s difficult”. It was like a shared code, a signal to avoid, dodge, and run the other way. The crust which we scratched on, but which would have demanded more time to crack open. This code or crust that separated us from the appealingly complicated and difficult subject matter was our shared whiteness. Whiteness operates based on self-exclusion: everything else is subject to it but whiteness itself. Whiteness does not question itself or realise its own existence. It is slippery and hard to hold and utilises distraction as means of escape. It lurks under everything held in the safety of normality and transforms itself when interrogated. Whiteness is the unsaid assumptions, a question that is never asked, never challenged.

I had wanted to linger on the parts which felt complicated, difficult, and uncomfortable to make this structure of whiteness visible. To force it to look upon itself and acknowledge its existence through its inheritance of colonial logic and exploitation. When this work started, that was what I was interested in, piercing the formerly safe structure of a museum with a sharp needle and releasing the threatening and unruly realities held within the exhibited objects. I felt so much frustration and pain and inadequacy when holding my hands up against the surface of unmoving complicacy, that the workshops momentarily felt as failures that could do more harm than good. Instead of challenging and moving, solidifying, and insulating that what it tried to change.

Yet when reading back on part two of this text, the cracks become visible. The needle was perhaps dull, but it was also pedagogical. Whiteness, racism, colonialism, repatriations, accountability... All the themes I had wanted to discuss had been very much visible and active, just in a different way than I had imagined – no matter how well I had tried to rid myself of preconceptions. Later when studying the notebooks of the participants, I even found a comparison to the cracks in a broken vase, similar to the crust I had envisioned. For some, writing was much easier than speaking aloud, and even some of the shortest scribbles contained words sinking deeper than the verbal conversations on site.

These processes of facilitation, co-learning between different agents, and other pedagogical processes require careful ethical consideration and sensitivity, as learning can be a violent, shattering process. Re-alignment, new positions, and realisations require time. I had to adjust my own approaches and assumptions throughout and after the workshops. Transforming the obscure into clear, like whiteness visible to itself, is an individual process full of hard surfaces, thickets, slippery paths, and sudden resistances. The choice of keeping the specific comments of the participants anonymous, as well as their names, provided the group with similar safety and strength as in my choice of becoming “I” instead of “we” or “us”. Together we are all part of the same structures and institutions, and we hold many different beliefs and experiences. Together we can raise questions that one individual may easily be scrutinised for.

The process of this work, this inquiry, map, journal, or confession, relied heavily on the cooperation and willingness of the institution and the study partners that participated in the workshops. It was a polite and understanding process, with investment into safety and dialogue. These strategies were informed by pedagogical frameworks and my experiences as an educator, and I have tried to respect the privacy, agency, and feelings of everyone within the community created before and throughout the process.

This gentle, safe process of possibly interrogating the practices and structures within a museum exhibition, is a non-threatening approach that relies more on infiltration than direct confrontation. I want to highlight another, more direct strategy, to bring this work into the frame of anticolonial action done by Black and Indigenous activists in the context of museum collections. Congolese restitution activist Mwazulu Diyabanza engages with museum exhibitions across Europe by taking objects originally stolen from colonised peoples and cultures, challenging the legal systems by positing that his actions cannot be identified as stealing the objects because they were stolen in the first place. (Diybanza in *The Guardian* 2021) Diybanza's direct action towards ethnographical exhibitions in Europe has been causing shock and resulted in multiple legal cases, further highlighting the complexity of contemporary coloniality.

I offer this example of Diybanza's activism to bring the possibilities outside institutions, policies, and polite strategies into this work. By taking the stolen objects from the institutions that house them, Diybanza forces those institutions and societies to justify the ownership of the objects and the legal actions related to his actions, bringing forth the violence and exploitation of colonialism that still continues in the form of museum exhibitions and research. In comparison to direct actions that challenge the existence of museum collections and legitimacy of study fields like Museology and Egyptology, my work has been silent and careful, still within the confines of approved legal limitations. I bring these actions to challenge the ideas of ethical actions within the anticolonial context. When the underlying ourstory is tangled and violent, it becomes harder to consider ethicality with clear answers and visible paths. Instead, there is only thick smoke and overgrown foliage. Tangled paths and crossroads leading to dead ends.

On Naming and On Doing

We did not discuss alternative words for “decoloniality” in the workshops but later found that the term “anticolonial” would have suited the question setting better. Looking back, it may have helped to at first discuss the term “colonialism” in the workshops, as the word often seemed like a foggy roof of a house no one dares to enter. It is even difficult to pronounce. I realise now, that there were probably as many understandings of what colonialism regarding Egypt, ancient Egypt, and Egyptology actually is, as there were workshop participants present. However, as I actively avoided taking on the role of a “lecturer”, laying out for example the *Tangled Roots on Murky Grounds* chapter would have contradicted my pedagogical aims.

Currently, decolonisation as a practice and as a discussion are very different things. As a conceptual tool, the term decolonisation is used in many varying contexts from education to arts and spiritual practises, but the practice of decolonisation is left without clear definitions or direct action. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang write about the adoption of the language surrounding decolonisation in educational and social justice contexts in their article *Decolonization is not a metaphor* (2012). They write:

“When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym.” (Tuck & Wayne Yang 2012, 3)

Continuing through the terrain provided by Tuck and Yang I can examine this study as a process that is creating space for a settler future. As I was beginning to formulate the process, I envisioned possibilities of decolonial action as something that could be conceived together with the museum staff through dialogue, artistic relationship-building, and confronting whiteness and colonial ourstories. The goal, even if left unsaid, was to find possibilities to redeem, repair, or make better the institution I rely on and am invested in. By envisioning research on decolonial work without questioning it as something incommensurable, I was actually envisioning settler futurity and futurity of colonial logic. Futurity seeking continuation, actionable but confined answers, and common ground on which to perform a change. I can find within myself the desire for roadmaps, synonyms, action plans, and guidance that centre my whiteness and white agency within the cultural and academic institutions I reside in.

The ideas of Tuck and Yang provide the possibility to reflect upon the process of the workshops through the whiteness that is inherent to them. Many workshop participants expressed the need to “know more” and “hear from an expert” as they felt that just talking as a group and reflecting on the objects in the centre of the exhibition was not enough when forming knowledge within the subject matter. We could all share this notion, the compelling innocence of ignorance, which often leads us to passivity. When we always need to know more to act, we never do. We hold on to our perceived innocence and deploy different tactics to uphold this idea that protects us from the consequences of our ourstories.

Tuck and Yang establish six ways in which white agents within the discussions about decolonisation seek to move towards innocence by self-centring, distracting, and storytelling, without having to confront the true goals of decolonisation: giving the land and sovereignty back to Indigenous peoples. It is important to understand the mechanics through which innocence is produced, and even though the moves provided by Tuck and Yang is not an exhaustive list of these modes of production, it is a good tool to start reflecting on our actions. I have paraphrased and summarised these moves to innocence as follows:

- i. Settler nativism, in which the settler establishes their right to the land or discourse through an imagined Indigenous ancestor or birth right.
- ii. Fantasising adoption as a process where the settler “becomes without becoming” the native through being adopted into an Indigenous tribe or culture.
- iii. Colonial equivocation, which equates unrelated struggles as decolonial action, for example, queer social justice work towards dismantling imperialism.
- iv. Conscientisation, “free your mind and the rest will follow”, the belief that decolonial action is primarily an individual’s intellectual journey to understanding decolonialism.
- v. At risk-ing / Asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples, the simultaneous casting of Indigenous “at-risk” and having them as a singular asterisk group within statistics.
- vi. Re-occupation and urban homesteading, movements like urban homesteading projects that are not conscious of the reality that the land they are occupying is already stolen land, continuing towards settler futurity.

It is important to understand the processes through which settlers and especially white agents within the white supremacist hierarchies strive to protect their (my, our) privilege and re-position themselves (myself, us) towards innocence within the conversation of decolonising the spaces/institutions/states they (I, we) inhabit. Decolonisation is not a metaphor, it is a practice that needs to be rooted in the local situation, needs, and Indigenous sovereignty. In the context of Finland, this means Indigenous sovereignty and giving the land back to Sámi people. Whilst writing this, Finland has not yet ratified the ILO 169 agreement that would require protection for Indigenous languages and way of life as well as greater self-determination. (Suomen YK-liitto 2021)

The complicated reality is that words never truly fully contain their meaning. Decolonisation is often treated as a utopian state of abolition, anti-racism, and Indigenous sovereignty when in reality they have different needs and goals that cannot habit the same futurity or fit into existing social justice strategies and ways of thinking. (Tuck & Yang 2012) Decolonisation needs to be an active practice of land and resource reparations, disobedience, and new relationship building. White people and settlers who do the work need to be ready to become traitors to white supremacy, to be disloyal and unruly towards the systems that require silence and apathy, that promote distance and reward abstractions. As scholars within academic institutions, I need to be able to name myself as settlers and trespassers, haunted by the incommensurability of decolonising. Settling into complacency and unhaunted flesh means to give space to settler futures and moves to innocence.

In *The Brutish Museum* (2020), Dan Hicks also writes about the concern of decolonialism becoming yet another accomplishment amongst others, a box to tick off in the achievements of an institution, science (Anthropology, Archaeology, Museology, Egyptology) or a state. Something for the museums to exhibit amongst other objects and superficial diversity. (Hicks 2020) Many museums and other institutions offer documents and directives as superficial proofs of progress. In these texts, decolonisation becomes a word without a call to action, a tamed metaphor, a word as an effective cul-de-sac. Decolonisation becomes something formless, a way of moving towards innocence. Institutions often focus on self-insulation instead of accountability, distancing themselves from their ourstories through the use of seemingly progressive language.

The workshops in Amos Rex provided an opportunity to create spaces and relations within the institution that resists these attempts of insulation. Instead, conversations, shared experiences, and hard questions can be a way to create fissures and sprains within the structures of the institution, by making the matter personal. Creating meaningful change takes time and collective will, so it is hard to evaluate the overall impact of the workshops. Museums are also big and stiff institutions, within which any change happens slowly and stubbornly. The workshops were interesting, odd, frustrating, and personal. Everyone who participated took something different with them and hopefully those ideas, experiences and feelings will grow into resistance, disobedience, and relentless haunting.

The echoes of the workshops are still heard in the hallways of the museum while writing this, but my fear is that – as all echoes – it will slowly die out. Into a whisper. Into a memory, replaced with new deadlines. Into an archived event.

HAUNTED FLESH

I have referenced haunting multiple times during this work. I have done this without explanations, leaving it to the very end of this work to give it time to leak through and cause uncomfortable vagueness. Silently and barely visible, haunted flesh has been with me during this whole process. I became aware of it during the workshops, in the silences and in the pauses between sentences. Within the exhibition space that resembled a tomb. In the stories of museum collections full of unknown objects acquired and transported through questionable means, disappearing *sah*, headless bodies and graverobbers. It is the ghost of ourstory believed dead, the smell of the carcass we pick and prod, the lingering spectre of the atrocities never absolved.

In their work, *A Glossary of Haunting* (2013), which has been one of the inspirations for the shadow glossary that accompanies this work, Eve Tuck and C. Ree name haunting as the cost of subjugation, inextricably linked to settler colonialism and modernity, which generates an endless amount of ghosts. (Tuck & Ree 2013, 4) Haunting happens on both institutional and personal levels, lingering in the “management, of the anxiety, the looming but never arriving guilt, the impossibility of forgiveness, the inescapability of retribution.” (ibid.)

Haunting, undefined, unsolved, and horrifying, needs to be present and unrelenting in the work towards anticolonial futures. It is the presence of a whisper, saying that there is no absolution, no answers and roadmaps, no enlightenment, and no escape. Tuck and Ree write: “Haunting doesn’t hope to change people’s perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved.” (ibid.) This form of resolving is not focused on the settlers or white colonial inheritors’ pursuit of conclusions and clear answers. In the context of our workshops in Amos Rex and more importantly the stolen objects, this haunting is inherent to the ourstories and the undead objects exhibited. The museum, then, is just a haunted house, a place of forcibly denied decay and unresolved grief.

Avery F. Gordon also writes about haunting in her work *Ghostly Matters – Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008). For Gordon, haunting is the presence of seeming absence, disruption of self-evident reality. Ghosts, then, are signs of haunting, omens, and empirical evidence, not just dead but the agent on their own that can draw us into very specific way of knowing and understanding ourstory. This specific way of knowing is haunting, and haunting is this way of knowing. Being haunted is to be confronted with the structure of the feeling of reality as a transformative recognition instead of just clinical and unfeeling knowledge. (Gordon 2008, 8) This idea of a transformative recognition through being haunted is not the recognition that precedes identifying or knowing something, but the eventuality that reveals something for and from the one being transformed. The haunting structure of the feeling of reality was the engine that initiated this work, through the encounters with the fish-shaped palette, the statue of Sekhmet and the coffin of Henu, which eventually led to the workshops reflected here.

Gordon emphasises that knowing ghosts, to be haunted is not a methodology or consciousness you can adopt and utilise. (Gordon 2008, 22) Writing from the place of haunting, inhabiting a haunted house, is making visible the things that are almost gone, bringing life into memories almost fallen into obscurity, and searching faint traces where no one had thought to look. In the context of the workshops, the ancient Egyptian objects were haunting and haunted, the ghosts, the people forgotten by ourstory and refused afterlife, stories left untold, injustices left unsolved. Their presence was relentless, uncomfortable, and almost impossible to comprehend. This haunting is also the residue of whiteness pushing “others” into margins, hiding itself as it excludes those it exploits. Ghosts cannot be forced out; they resist the institution’s singular memory and attempts of erasure.

Concerning haunting and whiteness, Gordon also describes haunting as terms of class, as something that unsettles the middle class in particular, forces them to confront realities they would otherwise explain away or push aside. (Gordon 2008, 131) Haunting, for Gordon, is something inherently magical: it's about "reliving events in all their vividness, originality, and violence so as to overcome their pulsating and lingering effects. Haunting is an encounter in which you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and the hope, the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of ourselves and our society. When you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter (or when it touches you), a force that combines the injurious and the Utopian, you get something different than you might have expected." (ibid.)

I want to suggest, with the direction of Tuck, Ree, and Gordon, that haunting is an integral part of anticolonial work. Museums are inherently haunted places, harassed by the spectres of those excluded, exploited, and forgotten. The familiar sentence "it's complicated" truly means it is haunted, uncomfortable to touch upon, like a cold spot in a warm room. It is important that we do not try to appease or pacify these ghosts, as being haunted, letting it seep into the flesh, is the requirement for staying accountable. Settler futurity and colonial logic require passivity and active by-standing, looking the other way, and being comfortable in indifference. Being haunted is uncomfortable and unsettling. Something that cannot be solved or truly known, as ghosts cannot be tamed and studied. For white agents within inherently colonial institutions, this haunted flesh is a catalyst for work that does not centre them and their needs but instead acknowledges the presence of ghosts that cannot be banished. The gnawing, relentless presence of the still living past, long hoped to be dead.

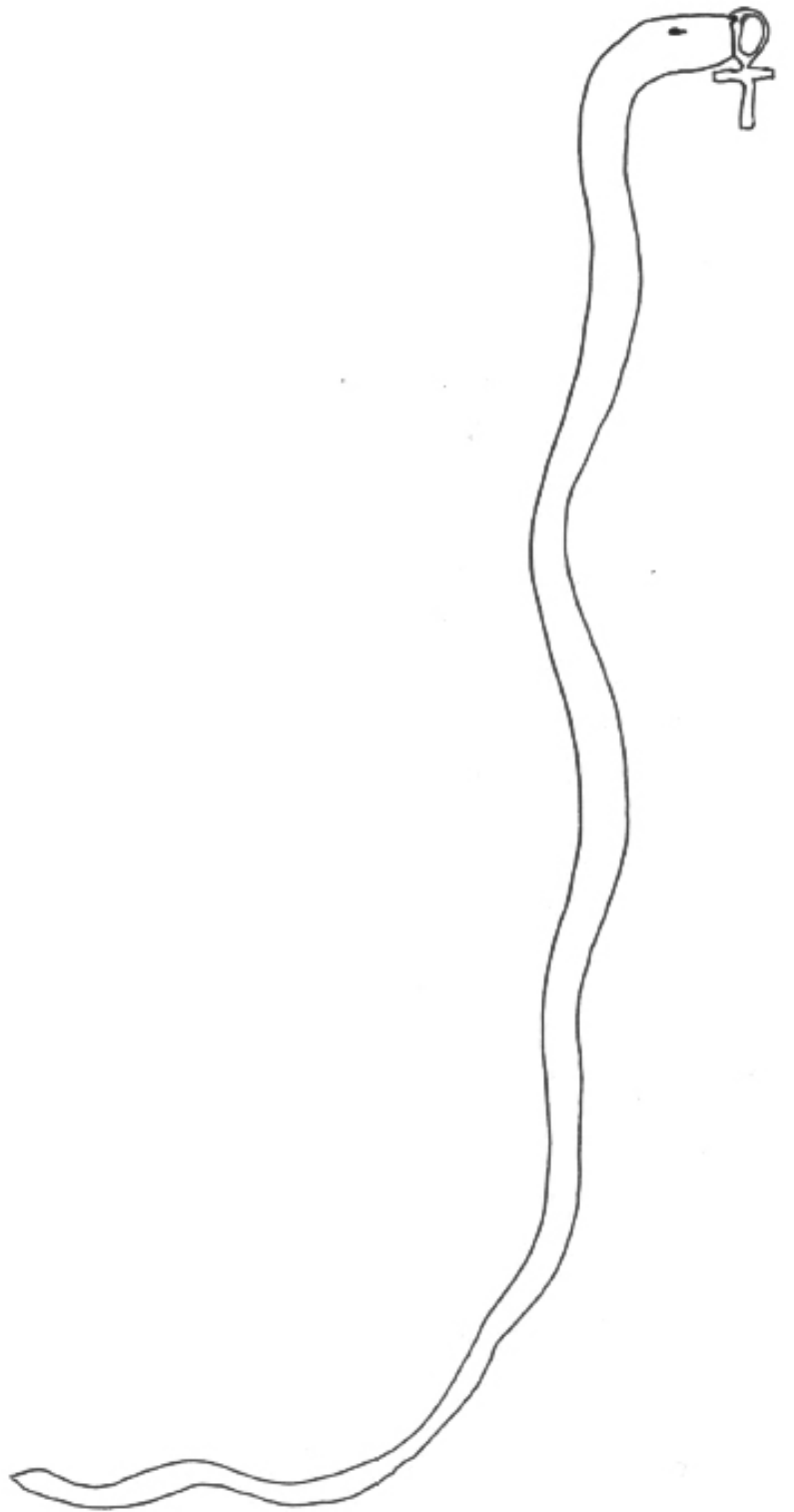
POST SCRIPTUM

In accordance with academic writing, I am supposed to map out the possible futures of this text, a continuation of the work. New research questions and subject matters. To clear out a pathway onto which I will walk next. The problem is that there are no paths when covered by forest. Or there may be some, that perhaps once were familiar, but I can no longer tell you where they might lead – nor do I want to. As stated in the beginning, this might not be a study. So what comes after a map? What happens when the confession ends? Can a logbook predict its own future?

This work tried to hold objects within its centre. But the grip was slippery, and I cannot reliably tell you if it succeeded. If I must point to directions, draw plans, and chart courses, that is where everything should start. Because after this work, after all that has been felt, said, and experienced, the objects will return to the collection of Museo Egizio and possibly disappear until someone thinks them worthy enough for display again. The *sah* will continue to be displayed, regarded as objects instead of remains. Amos Rex will move on to the next exhibition. This text will be archived in Aalto University's database and after a time the file might be corrupted and become inaccessible.

Referring back to Tuck & Yang (2017) and Hicks (2020), Jouwe (2018), and McLean (2017). there are dangers in academicizing and professionalising decolonial or anticolonial work. This text is not proof of expertise and I will not continue with it in the same context in the future. Anticolonial futures are built outside of institutions. Perhaps the next step is to rob a museum. Forcibly free objects from the exhibition before they are shipped back. Maybe the next step is the work to abolish museums and universities, redistribute resources to smaller agents and start building different communities that share knowledge and keep memories. As for me, I will continue to refuse to be an expert or authority, and instead, I want to be an unruly nuisance. I want to slip around inside the walls, slowly pushing out nails and leaking through inappropriate places. Dropping artworks from their hinges. Whispering alternative truths to the visitors. Haunting the exhibition halls. Grieving. Taking naps.

And



THANK YOU

Thank you, fish-shaped palette, your touch has left an eternal mark.

Thank you, Sekhmet, for letting me grieve in your presence.

Thank you Henu, for watching us and our actions.

Thank you, participants of the workshops, the staff of Amos Rex's *Egypt of Glory* exhibition team. Thank you for sharing your vulnerability, your thoughts, and your time. Thank you for being open to learning and reflecting, to new ideas and alternative realities, and thank you for being a teacher. Thank you for meeting me with gentle curiosity and kindness, and for sitting through uncomfortable conversations with calmness and honesty. Thank you for having faith in a better future, and for having a will to do things differently, together.

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Riitos Sekhmet



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GLOSSARY

This glossary is a shadow or a ghost to the text that is considered my thesis(?). Below, I have chosen to further disclose the use of some words or concepts in this work. The notes are rather short but, hopefully, work as a tool for grasping certain choices and ideas behind the text. Some points are also placed in this list to give the reader a bit more information that would have felt misplaced between the lines of the actual chapters or letters. These are perhaps the roots visible in the foot of a fallen tree, sprawling into different directions of the forest. Feel free to touch them and see where they might lead you.

Aalto University

Aalto University was established in 2010, when “[o]n 1 January 2010, the Helsinki School of Economics, Helsinki University of Technology and the University of Art and Design Helsinki merged and Aalto University started operating.” (Aalto university 2021, n.p.) The institution’s main campus resides in Otaniemi, Espoo and this work has been produced within the School of Arts and Architecture, specifically the Department of Art Education.

Abolition

Abolition has its root in the Abolitionist movement that created the circumstances that led to the end of the cross Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in 1900th century America. Led by Black and Indigenous philosophers, activists and writers, the contemporary meaning of abolition refers to the struggles to liberate those oppressed by racist white nationalist state, prison-industrial complex and public policies pend on the erasure. Abolition is the aware destruction of these oppressive institutions, structures, and mindsets in order to create better systems and institutions that are based on community care, mutual aid and shared resources. Abolition in the context of this text is an awakener. A reminder that the museum structures are built in a way that may never make the decolonisation of museums possible in reality. Unless the structures are radically reshaped, abolished, and rebuilt as something completely new, drastically shifting the power dynamics, ethical aims, and societal purposes of the museum.

Accountability

In *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, David Anderson raises a question: “At the heart of the issue is a question – to whom are publicly funded museums, and museum professionals, accountable?” (Anderson 2012, 225) He writes that human rights are one of our biggest global crises, and that museums can have and should find their role in this battle, as museums cannot exclude themselves from the society which they are created to serve. (Anderson 2012) Accountability within my text refers to the accountability of museums as institutions, which begins and is achieved through the accountability taken by the individual people working within these institutions – whom I focus on.

Amos Rex

Amos Rex is an art museum dedicated foremostly to contemporary art. It is built underground, in the centre of Helsinki, under and into the functionalist Lasipalatsi square. The exhibition spaces are dome-shaped, and therefore new wall structures and paths are made separately for each new exhibition. The museum is based on the Swedish-speaking Finn Amos Anderson’s collection and the Konstsamfundet foundation. The focus of Konstsamfundet is to support Swedish-speaking Finnish culture, and the museum’s own collection comprises mostly Finnish art.

The museum is new, opened in 2018, but its history is entwined with the previous Amos Anderson Art Museum, which existed in Helsinki from 1965 until 2017. The Amos Anderson Art Museum’s curatorial focus was wide: modernist art, contemporary art, and ancient civilisations, and its collection – which is now the Amos Rex collection – mimics this mixture. The Amos Anderson Art Museum also had an exhibition on ancient Egypt, in 1970, displaying for example the same coffin which drowned *sah* I have grieved in this text.

Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt is considered the world's oldest civilisation, dating back eight thousand years into the past. Geographically it was situated very close to the same borders that outline modern Egypt (Arab Republic of Egypt) today. The final era of ancient Egypt began with the blossoming of the Roman Empire, making it also the longest-lasting, largely unchanged (although it did indeed see many changes) civilisation through time. (Meri 2020)

This text focuses on the three ancient objects, their journey to Europe, and on how they are displayed and considered in white institutions today. Ancient Egypt was an extremely hierarchical society, and I at times speak of ancient Egyptians without reflecting on *which* ancient Egyptians – however aware that the original owners or worshippers of the objects may well have been oppressors themselves.

Art education

This body of work is placed within the field of art education. I aim to practice feminist pedagogy, which is also a reason for my choice of co-writing and of methods of working. Other pedagogical approaches that I find important to mention are critical pedagogy, radical pedagogy, pedagogy of the oppressed, and pedagogy of hope, which of course all intertwine with each other. (Suoranta 2005)

Colonialism and imperialism

The text focuses mainly on the three ancient Egyptian objects exhibited in the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition, studies possible new relations to these objects, how they were presented to the audience (how museums in general present objects or art with a colonialist history to their audiences) and contemplates on these object's journey from Egypt to Italy. I concentrate on Western colonialism and imperialism, since that is what is relevant to the discussion on Western museum institutions, as they are built upon Western colonialism, still practice neo-colonialism, and benefit from Eurocentrism, and white privilege and supremacy. This to say that I do not intentionally touch upon Egypt's own (problematic) politics, the Ottoman conquest in Egypt, or the imperialism practiced by ancient Egypt itself – as I in several cases have found that these are also used as routes of escaping a discussion of the European colonialist exploitation of Egypt.

Dead / Duat

The ancient Egyptians believed in Duat, the afterlife, and believed it to be a rather concrete place – where the fields still need sowing and bread baking. Hence the items placed with the deceased in the grave were thought to transfer with them to the afterlife, through magic. For example, miniature figurines, which were thought to come alive in Duat to serve the deceased. (Meri 2020) It then seems rather accurate to consider whether these deceased have now been robbed of their belongings and helpers and whether they themselves have been taken from Duat – or are they stuck in some sort of limbo now? Then again, it was thought that you are immortal for as long as your name keeps being mentioned by the living. Duat was not an afterlife per se, but rather the second life, as death as most perceive it today was not a concept in ancient Egypt.

Decolonisation and anticolonialism

George J. Sefa Dei writes comprehensively: “[...] decolonization is not a thing. It is not an obvious manifestation either. It is instead the end goal on a long journey to reach minds, souls, spirits and bodies as we collectively seek to transform our communities and connect both the physical and metaphysical realms of existence. As many have noted, decolonization is a process of working to bring change by foremost helping to rid ourselves of the complexes of subordination and acquiescence (see also Diop, 1974). Interestingly, while we may all talk quite a bit about decolonisation, we often do not do decolonization. Decolonization is action oriented. It is a purposeful and intentional act. It derives from an awareness of the violence and genocide perpetrated under colonialism and settler colonialism. Decolonization also marks an attempt by Indigenous and colonized bodies to take control of our own thought processes and to act in concrete ways to address colonialism, patriarchy and other forms of social oppression. [...] Anti-colonial and decoloniality are intertwined logics. Our political and discursive practices for change must be anti-colonial in outlook and orientation. This way the anti-colonial becomes the path to a decolonial future.” (Dei 2019, 7)

Egypt of Glory

The exhibition *Egypt of Glory - The Last Great Dynasties* ran in Amos Rex art museum 9.10.2020 – 21.3.2021. The exhibition was a collaboration with Museo Egizio. Some objects were also on loan from the Finnish National Museum and the Finnish Egyptological Society. There was a simultaneous exhibition in Kumu art museum in Tallinn, also showing ancient Egyptian artefacts from the Italian collection.

Egypt of Glory was divided into ten different themes, including for example sections focusing on time, gods, and the afterlife. It suggested a path for the visitor, but was not built chronologically, and could therefore be seen in any wished order. There were three *sah* on display and a big selection of animal *sah*. The ethical challenges and choices made concerning the displaying of *sah* were addressed in an exhibition panel. One small section of the exhibition displayed photographs of Schiaparelli's excavation sites but focused only on archaeological tools and methods of documentation. The word "colonialism" did not appear once in any of the exhibition texts.

Eyes of Henu

Henu – Sole Companion of a King, had several of his belongings present in the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition but was himself nowhere to be found. His coffin resided in one of the exhibition rooms with the following label: "Such rectangular coffins were popular during the Middle Kingdom. Short spells and offering formulas were usually written on the coffin, also there was a pair of eyes painted. The deceased, placed in the coffin on their left side, was able to see the outside world through the eyes. The term 'sole companion of a king' probably referred to Pharaoh's trusted courtier, but its exact meaning is not known." (Amos Rex 2020)

I later found out that the *sah* of Henu rests in Museo Egizio's storage space, but is in "such poor shape that he was unfit to travel with his belongings to Finland." (Amos Rex 2021)

Fish-shaped palette

In a school of stone-carved fishes laid a particularly sympathetic-looking exhibition object. It's exhibition label read: "Fish-shaped palettes originate from the Predynastic Period. They were presumably used as burial gifts and for grinding colour pigments for cosmetic and other purposes. [...] To the Egyptians, who spent their lives by the river Nile, fish was an important part of the diet, both in this life and the afterlife. However, the Egyptian attitude towards the fish was mixed: on the one hand it was held in low esteem, but on the other hand, it was considered a symbol of fertility. The fish also enjoyed lasting popularity as an art motif for thousands of years." (Amos Rex 2020)

Goddess Sekhmet

Amos Rex described Sekhmet and her statue as following: "The lion-headed Sekhmet, whose name in the ancient Egyptian language means 'she who is powerful', is depicted here with the solar disk and the uraeus snake above her head. Sekhmet, the daughter of the sun god Ra, was a ferocious and merciless goddess of war and pestilence whose burning breath was felt in the scorching winds blowing from the desert, and whose deeds nearly destroyed mankind. However, in her hand, she holds the life symbol ankh, and in the other the wadj sceptre shaped like a papyrus roll. These symbolise the goddess's ability to cure illness and restore life in the midst of death and desolation. This statue of Sekhmet was discovered in the temple complex of Karnak, dedicated to Amun. Pharaoh Amenhotep III had his temples furnished with hundreds of statues of Sekhmet to sooth the goddess's wrath and to benefit from her blessings." (Amos Rex 2020) The statue of Sekhmet "belongs" to the original Drovetti collection of Museo Egizio, meaning I do not know what atrocities she has seen through the times.

Kataja Ekholm (he/they)

Kataja is the other conspirator, unruly nuisance and disobedient unprofessional behind this work. Uncomfortable with being confined by introductions and the glorified personhood of biographies, they instead have opted to give the bare minimum of information about themselves. Some of it might be false. Kataja is an Aalto-University student, white and in the crossroads of multiple intersectional structures of privilege, which they utilise for the purposes of infiltration and trespassing. They take naps to avoid labor and actively plans escaping to the sea.

Lost *Sah*

Sah, the Egyptian word for a mummified body is used in this text instead of the word “mummy”. The etymology of “mummy” derives from the Arabic word “mummiya”, meaning black tar or bitumen, which *sah* were believed to be covered in before the mummification process was studied further. The word “mummy” is today charged with many preconceptions and ideas generated by European and North American popular culture, filled with cultural appropriation, racism, and false information regarding both ancient and contemporary Egypt. (Martin & Häggman 2020) This body of this text is devoted to the mistreated *sah*, robbed, lost at sea, displayed as entertainment, hence the use of the original word.

Melanie Orenius (she/they)

Melanie is an artist and art educator, torn between several roles as a co-writer of this text: mostly as Curator of Education at Amos Rex and therefore one of the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition makers, and as a student questioning the exhibition’s themes (lack of themes) through this graduate work, whilst being part of yet another big institution, the Aalto University. Examining alliances and loyalties, Melanie dove into her love-hate relationship towards museums, constantly reminding herself that gratitude and criticism can exist in the same body. You can, and you should, by minimum nibble on the hand that feeds you – at least if the hand is a white institution.

Museo Egizio

Museo Egizio in Turin, Italy, is a museum dedicated to ancient Egyptian artefacts and their study, founded in 1824. Today, they state: “Dialogue, scientific research and accessibility to cultural heritage underpin the activities of the Museo Egizio and are placed at the centre of its daily work. In order to achieve this, fundamental is the collaboration with other international museums and cultural institutions. The collection that the Museo Egizio has the honor and duty to preserve belongs to the whole humanity: that is the reason why the objects displayed at the Museo Egizio are often shown in temporary exhibitions, both in Italy and abroad.” (Museo Egizio n.d.)

Ourstory

The decision to use the word “ourstory” instead of “history” in this text was quite simple. The past has been largely written by and through the perspective of white men, leaving out the voices of women, queer, Indigenous, Black and others marginalized throughout time. Especially in the context of Egyptology and Museology, I find it imperative to continue the work of rewriting, broadening, and unravelling what has been made to seem as the definite past and facts – when there in fact has been much erasure of information.

Racism in Finland

According to a study published in 2020, four out of five people of African descent living in Finland have faced racist discrimination. (Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu 2020) Roma people are often followed or banned from shops or discriminated against in job seeking (only two examples), merely based on their names. (Yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu n.d.) Finland still has not ratified the ILO-169 convention and continues to colonise indigenous Sámi lands. (Suomen YK-liitto 2021) Yet Finland has for a long time distanced itself from the topics of colonisation, as if not having been an Imperialist state means that for example neo-colonialism, white privilege, or Eurocentrism does not apply in the Finnish context, or that these would not be tied to the amount of racism and far-right movements in the country.

Repatriation

Repatriations, i.e., returning a stolen object or artwork of a museum to the land or people which it was stolen from, is and is not a central question in this text. It is not central, due to it not being a relevant topic regarding the *Egypt of Glory* exhibition in Amos Rex. Museo Egizio has not been asked for repatriations, and none of the objects are a part of Amos Rex’s collection. The issue is however also automatically central, due to the wider discussion surrounding how ancient Egyptian artefacts have come to reside in foreign museums, including Museo Egizio.

White supremacy

Layla F. Saad wrote: “White supremacy is a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races. White supremacy is not just an attitude or a way of thinking. It also extends to how systems and institutions are structured to uphold this system of dominance.” (Saad 2020, 12) White supremacy is the legacy of Christianity, colonialism, imperialism, cross Atlantic slave trade and Indigenous genocide that plague our ourstory. It is a false belief, a delusion, that there is a white race which is smarter, more capable, cleaner, and morally pure compared to the “others”. White supremacy relies on the continued colonial logic and violence of modernity and capitalism to function, as well as the apathy of those benefitting from it.

