

*Fields of blue* / Ai Ono

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## *Abstract*

This thesis consists of a material research of colours for creating ceramic art work, inspired by the music of the Latvian composer, Pēteris Vasks. The initial idea was the exploration of how colours and abstract images, that radiated from Vasks's music as subjective inner visual experiences, could be transferred onto a tangible ceramic art work. As the process developed, it raised another question of how ceramics, which is considered rigid and permanent material, could be utilised for expressing the ephemerality and transience that was evident in the music. This thesis could be divided into two components, one being a research for gaining fundamental knowledge in developing and supporting ideas for the art work, and the other being a hands-on practical production of the art work. Through a subjective contemplation of the topic, inspirations such as visual music, minimalist painters and Japanese aesthetic were collated. After different thoughts were crystalised into one concrete idea, colouring methods used for textile dying became the chosen field to be explored. While textile artists are striving to keep the colours permanent, my approach was towards the opposite, to make impermanent. As a result, the experimental exhibition, showcasing the final art work with music improvisations was held at Lume Galleria in Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture from 21st to 25th January, 2013.

Keywords: ceramic art, Pēteris Vasks, practice-led research, synesthesia, visual music, colour psychology, abstract expressionism, Japanese aesthetics, textile colouring, music improvisation

*Prelude - the beginning -*

The first snow has fallen in Helsinki as I write this. It has not settled much, yet only a slight sight of glistering silver light seen in the morning makes a difference in the air. Yellow autumn leaves of birch are half covered in white, and almost all the red and orange coloured maple leaves have fallen from the trees decorating the streets below. It is my fourth winter since coming to Finland. Yet again, enduring biting cold weather in the darkness begins.

Last winter, a concert performed by an Argentinean cellist, Sol Gabetta took place at Finlandia Hall. It was a cold and dark evening as usual with any Finnish winter days. The light that lit up the concert hall seemed exceptionally warm and welcoming in contrast. I sat in the very front row where almost all the small noises from the performers could be caught, such as the sound of paper being turned over and leather shoes rustling against the wooden floor. Amongst all the programmes performed that evening, the one that remains vividly in mind is the encore. It was called *The Book for solo cello (Gramata Cellam)*, written by the Latvian composer, *Pēteris Vasks*.

It was that moment. I suddenly felt shivers dashing through my body and I was mesmerised by the strong emotions and colours emerging from the music. In some parts, it felt as if layers and layers of different achromatic coloured paper was torn out from an unreachable place in the sky, falling softly to dissolve into the deep ocean. It was this particular evening with the music of Pēteris Vasks that became the starting point of my thesis work development.

Based on personal interpretations derived from the music of Pēteris Vasks, this thesis questions and explores the dualities between sound and the material, ceramics. Permanence and impermanence, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, such dualities are key elements when exploring ways of expression.

*The snow lightly falls  
in the midst of night.*

*The moon hidden silently behind clouds  
its presence unknown.*

*Surrounded by darkness  
an eagle drifts in the wind.*

*Out in a forest  
there is fire softly swaying  
changing its colours.*

*The snow only visible above the flame  
vainly vanishes into the air  
before reaching to the ground.*

A personal note in winter 2011  
from *The Book for solo cello (Gramata Cellam)*  
composed by Pēteris Vasks

In a self-reflective context, the content of the thesis is highly dependent on subjective contemplation through auto-biographical and ethnographical experiences. Auto-ethnographical background, especially Japanese aesthetics that emerged from the philosophies of Buddhism and Animism, and other background knowledge in colour psychology, visual music and minimalist painters are influential facets for my thoughts behind the work development. Some poetic verses are dispersed throughout the writing which depict my imaginary sceneries from Vasks's music. Also, other influential quotations from literature that appropriately outline my thoughts are included. Instead of relying on vivid pictures or drawings which may restrict the reader's visionary understanding, I aspire to bring colourful and free-flowing panorama to the readers mind through those narrative and poetic verses. As the ideas and thoughts crystallise at the later stage, the writing shifts to practical and photographic documentations of my artistic development through in depth material research. Hence, this is a practice-led research, investigating how to express sound within ceramic art work through a material research of colours that radiate from the music of Vasks.

In terms of time scale, the initial inspirational concert took place in winter 2011 and soon afterwards I developed one art work based on the experience. There was a period when I suspended my thesis development due to other projects I was involved with. Those projects were strongly design-oriented, therefore urged me further to develop an artistic work for the thesis. I resumed afresh in summer 2012 and in total, researching, making and writing were done in parallel and completed in February 2013.

Prior to starting the thesis work, I was given a chance to visit South Korea in Spring 2012, to work as an apprentice for a ceramic artist. This experience broadened my perspective on ceramics, and as a result contributed greatly in once more realising the abilities of the material clay. Therefore this story will be mentioned also at a later stage.

## *Practice-led research*

From October to December 2012, there was a course on 'Practice-led Research', organised by artist-researchers, Maarit Mäkelä and Pia Staff at Aalto University. It helped to frame and delineate my study with the emphasis on practical research<sup>1</sup>. 'Practice-led research', often called 'art-based' or 'practical based' research, is a relatively new term that started to be recognised in Finland in 1990s (Ryynänen in Mäkelä 2007, p.159). In summary, Mäkelä states that the main characteristic of practice-led research is a focus on issues, concerns and interests that are explored and manifested through the production of creative artifacts (Mäkelä 2007, p.159). Artistic process could sometimes be ignored or concealed behind the finished artefacts, yet the process has also been given a significant role in the field of practice-led research. Michael Biggs, one of the pioneers in the field, considers that 'the principal feature is the desire or need to create artifacts and to present them as part of the answer to research questions posed at the outset'. Artefacts are therefore given a voice that communicate between the artefact, maker and viewer (Biggs in Mäkelä 2007, p.159).

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1. Mäkelä mentions that practice-led research is also called 'art-based' or 'practice-based' (2007, p.159). In these terms, the main concept remains as the relationship between the researcher, who also works as an artist or designer, and artefacts, in which one's knowledge is embedded and reflected (Mäkelä and Nimmikurva 2011, p.1). According to a report on practice related research which is regarded as the guideline in the field, written by Linda Candy, they are described as follows: 1. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based. 2. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led. (Candy in Creativity and Cognition Studios, 2006) Although the guideline suggests those differences, they remain equivocal. For example in UK, practice-based has been used in general when depicting research that involves practical artistic process, whereas in Finland, practice-led has been used commonly. In short, I feel that I have entered into those two fields with blurred boundaries when conducting the thesis. The discussion of the ambiguous terminologies is not considered as the essential part, thus I have chosen 'practice-led' to describe my approach towards the thesis development.

Are we to look at cherry blossoms only in full bloom,  
the moon only when it is cloudless?

(Kenko Yoshida in Keene 1998, p.115)

The previous quotation from *Essays in idleness* written in 1300-32 A.D, by Kenko Yoshida, the famous poet of classical Japanese literature, appropriately captures the characteristics of the Japanese aesthetic that cherishes asymmetry and irregularity (Keene 1998, p.115). In my opinion, this also has a connotation to the approach of practice-led research where the emphasis is placed on the process. Yoshida continues his poem:

[...] To long for the moon while looking on the rain, to lower the blinds and be unaware of the passing of the spring - these are even more deeply moving. Branches about to blossom or gardens strewn with faded flowers are worthier of our admiration. [...] In all things, it is the beginnings and ends that are interesting.

(Keene 1998, p.115)

This suggests that things which are absolutely in a perfect state do not leave any room for further development and prevent us from having more imagination. Whereas things that are not perfect bring possibilities for development and enable us to think thoroughly in order to progress forward (Keene 1998, p.xxiii). In the quotation, ends do not mean the climax nor finalised products, but instead refer to the narratives that occurred after the climax. The development as well as the evaluation process are regarded as crucial throughout the creative process.

Throughout the process, documentation has become a crucial part. Artist researchers, Maarit Mäkelä and Nithikul Nimkulrat state that there are two types of documentation in practice-led research. Firstly, documentation *of* making artefacts, such as technical notes and failures, that take place at the same time as the actual hands-on experiments. Secondly, documentation *for* making artefacts implies researching and collecting inspirations that occur before the actual production of artefacts (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat 2011, p.8). Prior to starting my thesis, I was encouraged to keep a working diary by Mäkelä to record both kinds of documentations as well as happenings of everyday life that did not connect directly to the work development. I thank her for giving me this advice as it helped greatly as a guide for my journey through the thesis process. I highly recommend others who are conducting thesis works also to keep a working diary.

In the next chapter, I would like to start with one of the stories from documentation *for* making artefacts, by rewinding the clock back to my childhood memories to explore where my interests and inspirations lie. Also, more notes related to practice-led research will be mentioned coherently with my personal approach to ceramics.

## *Nostalgia - background -*

I see colours of spring.

Having been brought up in a secluded countryside village surrounded by bamboo forests, those scenes of spring are distinct reminders of my home in Japan. It feels as though the images are becoming radiant the longer I stay distant from home. Reflecting on my childhood memories, it started to seem apparent why I have especially been interested in colours. I was born between a father who is a chef, and a mother, a piano and flower arrangement teacher. Since childhood, I was accustomed to seeing colourful meals presented on stylish plates at his restaurant, and unique flower arrangements at home and exhibitions. By observing nature and other surrounding factors, my eyes for colours were unconsciously cultivated.

Another essential aspect for my obsession with colours originates from my name. I was named Ai Ono which is translated as a vast field (ono) of indigo blue (ai). It has always been my favourite colour, especially the darker shades that remind me of a deep blue sea and dusk. Since coming to Helsinki, I have enjoyed watching the nightless sky in summer, 'sininen hetki' (blue moment) as Finns describe it. In the moments between sunset and night, after the warm colours of sunset fade, birds start to sing amid a light blue sky at midnight mistaken for the morning light.

As for music, since my mother is a piano teacher, she was trying to direct me towards a music path. Through one of her musical acquaintances, I started learning the cello at the age of ten. Although I was interested in playfully making random sound with the beautifully crafted instrument, I did not have enough talent nor motivation to practice hard at the time. Instead, I preferred to follow a path to be a ceramic artist. However, my approach towards music

*Under a persimmon tree,*

*Listening to subtle wind  
through the bamboo forest  
the cherry blossoms in bloom  
amongst fresh verdure*

Personal note in spring 2012



changed in Autumn 2010, when my friend organised an event with a contemporary dancer in Helsinki. They invited me to perform the improvisational cello accompaniment to the dance (Fig. 1). It was my very first experience improvising in public, and this became an incentive for practicing the cello once again from a basic level. In fact, soon after the event, I started taking cello lessons every week from music students at Metropolia as part of their teaching programme.

Throughout my study on ceramics, the emphasis has been placed strongly on developing colour palette of glazes. While three-dimensional forms are the most important aspect for most ceramicists, it did not strike me as significant. Having seen many art works with a lot of effort and time, being ruined only by the last stage of glaze firing, I started developing my work in reverse order. Understanding glazes, for example their surface qualities; matte, satin, glossy, crackled, peeled, crawling, runny, stiff, opaque, transparent, translucent, as well as the effect on rim and edges and the distortion of different clay bodies ... I alter the forms in accordance with what kind of glazes I apply.

Having worked with ceramics, I consider myself as a reflective practitioner who utilises the skill of crafting as a reflective tool in order to generate personal artistic expressions (Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, p.42). The artist researcher Pia Staff, states that 'the process of making functions as a sort of concrete conversation where the question at hand are tried out and the attendant thinking is recorded in the material' (Staff 2012, p.57) I tend not to sketch, paint or draw my ideas. Instead, forms are acquired by working directly with the material with hands, and colours or textures that satisfy and meet my imaginations are obtained through a series of material research. As ceramics is a three-dimensional material, contrast of shadows and surface qualities are difficult to achieve with a two-dimensional plan. Even with a help of a three-dimensional modelling software, it often fails to create the matching atmosphere compared to the real objects. In the context of material-based art, I rely on the process of craftsmanship that involves repetitive process of making, evaluating and improving.



Fig.1: Improvisational dance event,  
Autumn 2010, Arabia, Helsinki

Dutch art historian Liesbeth den Besten states that our hands are the most sensitive part of our body enabling us to touch, feel, manipulate and handle materials and tools. There is a direct connection between the hand, skill and craft, and therefore we are able to think through our hands (den Besten in Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, p. 45). She also claims that although the brain had been considered as the most influential asset for a creative process, it has started to be understood that we depend highly on the haptic repository within the body (ibid, p.45). By utilising hands in the time-accelerative, as well as meditative and contemplative process of crafting, one can develop materials, techniques and knowledge. (den Besten and Prühl in ibid, p.45-48).

Maarit Mäkelä and Tim O’Riley say that the creative process, that applies in many fields of art, design, music as well as science, results from an outcome that is an amalgamation of things discovered by chance (Mäkelä & O’Riley 2012, p.10). It is continued that “serendipitous moments, where intention and accident collide, are perhaps the places where creative practices [...] draw their strengths and particularities” (ibid). Through observations, discussions, encounters and experiments, knowledge has been accumulated and presented through the hands.

Craft could be divided into two categories; conventional and contemporary. While conventional craft concentrates mainly on functionality and skill, the latter is considered as *content-oriented craft*, or *material based art*, which embrace personal emotions or expressions that need to be interpreted by the viewer (Ihatsu in Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, p.45-48). It is closer to the realm of fine art, where expression, aesthetics, conceptuality and interpretation are considered as important elements. It is only the use of materials considered to be utilised for craft artefacts, such as glass, ceramics, jewellery and textiles, that brings boundaries in between fine art and content-oriented craft (Mäkelä & Latva-Somppi 2011, p.43). Depending on the context, I shift in between those two fields, although I am not competent enough to call myself a skilled craftsman, having experienced only seven years of practice in ceramics. In terms of this thesis development, *content-oriented craft* would best describe my approach which strives to express emotions to the viewer through the ceramic work.

## Work style

My work style had crystalised as a result of my final BA work in ceramics where a series of thrown forms and glazes were developed. By utilising porcelain as a canvas for glazes inspired by the surrounding nature, I finalised on a form that was minimal round shape with a concaved top surface. In order to enhance the quality of glazes, the area where no glazes were applied was polished thoroughly to eliminate the slight sheen on the surface, to bring a matte finish. Since the first year of my MA, I have continued developing a series of work based on the same format, yet in a different scale and making method. The colour palette has become mainly white with textures, striving to reflect the quality of the sceneries of Finnish winter.

Simultaneously, soon after Sol Gabetta’s concert, 3.11 Earthquake devastated the Tohoku region of Japan. I found solace when listening to Vasks’s music during my longest insomniac period. Imaginations emerged from the music, *The Book for solo cello (Gramata Cellam)*, as well as other pieces synchronised in synergy with poignant scenes of the catastrophic disaster. Different reflections of white colour with diverse textures were flickering in my mind when listening to *The Book*, and the violin concerto *Distant Light*. Through those two experiences of solitary winter and the disaster, my first work *still* was created almost haphazardly amid experiments (Fig. 2). My intention was to convey concealed emotions in everyday life and human sensitivities through colour and texture. While the colour ‘white’ alludes to purity, when it is combined with textured surfaces, subtle or dynamic, it grants a different perspective on how we perceive the colour itself. I consider that the quality of white glazes that have tonal and textural differences, and the cracks, may evoke strong feelings such as sorrow and despair, that radiated from the music of Vasks.





Fig. 2: *Still* / 2011

When observing the work objectively, frozen atmosphere was perceived. Yet it seemed that the flow of sound and its transient quality did not emerge from the work. Since then, my exploration of how to express the ephemera of sound became the centre point for my artistic development. Music and ceramics started to work in a cross-fertilising manner along the process.

## *Péteris Vasks*

*Most people today no longer possess beliefs, love and ideals.*

*The spiritual dimension has been lost.*

*My intention is to provide food for the soul*

*and that is what I preach in my works.*

(Vasks, Schott music 2012)

Péteris Vasks is the Latvian contemporary composer born in 1946 in a leafy suburb of Riga. Vasks is described by a musicologist, Arnolds Klotins, as ‘a composer with ethical and spiritual convictions (Klotins, 2008)’. Due to serene and atonal expressions found in most of his music, his compositions are generally categorised in the realm of minimalism. However, his works also comprise elements from Latvian folk music and aleatoric experiments that depend on chance when composing (Schott Music 2012). The music journalist and scholar, K. Robert Schwarz states that the characteristic of minimalism in music is the notion of reduction, relying on a minimal of the materials in composition. He also mentions that minimalist music do not build up to its climax nor provide emotional expressions (Schwartz 1996, p.9). If this is the definition regarding to minimalists in general, Vasks’s music could not be classified appropriately in this realm.

As Vasks is a relatively new composer in the field of music, I struggled to find his literature written in English. Fortunately through the Netherlands-based record company, Challenge Records, I was able to contact him directly. Later in November 2012, I was given an opportunity to meet Vasks in person in Riga, the capital of Latvia, when he had a premier at Riga Dome Cathedral for his new composition *Lord, open our eyes*, dedicated to Mother Teresa (Fig.3). Despite his hectic schedule, he invited me for dinner one day before the premier, thus I was able to spend about three hours discussing his music. The following paragraphs are written, based on the informations I collated from the interview.



During the interview, due to a language barrier, a lot of body language was used as means of communication. This resulted effectively in capturing his friendly and passionate character. It was obvious that he was very attentive and sensitive to every kind of sound. He even demonstrated how to hold a wine glass specifically to create the nicest sound when making a toast.

The first question I raised was again about the categorisation. Vasks firmly answered that he is a contemporary composer and dislikes being called a minimalist. Rather, he stated that he prefers to be called a maximalist, as he is open to utilising many techniques and ideas for music compositions. He talked excitedly about his inspiration which is the sound of nature, such as the chirping of birds and insects, and the flow of water and wind, without any disturbance from humans. It is not only the beauty or the peacefulness of nature that he strives to express through his music, but also the interaction between mankind and nature, how mankind affected and caused destruction of nature, and how nature raged against mankind, elicits his creativity. There is a sense of epiphany that resides in his work, when a dramatic harmony suddenly diminishes into nothingness, then springs out with the most tranquil and subtle sound. Through his music, he attempts to make people aware of environmental issues that is happening at present on a universal level.

While I was questioning him for his inspiration, he kept moving his hands sideways and upwards depicting the clouds in the sky, stretched across and how spirits can raise through the clouds to reach to the above. This spirituality is expressed with the elevation of sound that he utilises often in his work, normally with violins. When listening to Vasks's music, there is a sense of a stable line that runs through constantly, dividing the sound into higher or lower notes. With this method, he strives to capture the dualities such as in heaven and hell, positive and negative, light and dark, sky and earth.

Fig. 3: From the premiere in Riga Dome Cathedral, November 2012

*Arvo Pärt*

Arvo Pärt, the Estonian contemporary composer born in 1935, is the most influential figure for Vasks. Pärt is known as the pioneer of *holy minimalism*, holy as in the sense of spiritual and placid religiosity in his music. Pärt’s works embrace fragile and tranquil nature that blurs the boundary between sound and silence. According to Schwarz, his music speaks of an understated grief that transcends the bustle and novelty of our modern age (Schwarz 1996, p. 208-214). In *Für Alina* (1976), and *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978) the resonation of every single note played slowly and calmly in his music evokes strong emotions that are both positive and negative. The power that a single note possesses is utilised to its maximum of expressive ability in his minimal composition (Schwartz 1996, p. 215). This also applies to Vasks’s music, which therefore makes it clear why he called himself a maximalist.

The music journalist, Tom Service mentions a BBC documentary programme *Modern Minimalists* (1997) when Pärt was interviewed by an Icelandic singer, Björk. Pärt talks about the mystic and powerful quality of sound, how it can affect people in good and bad ways, and how it can both kill and comfort them. His new simplistic style consists of two aspects, one being his sins, and the other, forgiveness. He continues that music mostly possesses two voices, one is more complicated and subjective, and the other is simple and objective (Service, 2012).

*White*

*Silver*

*Grey*

*Blue*

*Indigo*

*No sound*

*No light*

*No colour*

*Black.*

Personal note in summer 2012  
from listening to *Viatore* composed by Péteris Vasks

## *Viatore*

Péteris Vasks composed a piece called *Viatore* in 2001, which means a wanderer or traveller. This was dedicated to Arvo Pärt, as Vasks experimented with Pärt's techniques used in *Fratres* (1977). In *Fratres*, the main melody is played in sequence, separated by the sound of percussion. The melody appears like waves, undulating softly then vigorously, altered by the changing dynamics of sound. It eventually fades away, vanishing into nothingness (Schwarz 1998, p.214). During the interview with Vasks, he mentioned that the reincarnation of life of mankind and nature is expressed with the reoccurring melody. As the title suggests, the music embraces the sense of development, fulfillment and farewell (Klotins 2008).

My first encounter with Vasks's music was with *The Book for solo cello (Gramata Cellam)*, based on which I produced a series of work with white coloured glazes. Since then I started listening to variety of his compositions. It may have been due to my attachment with the cello, *Viatore*, with its strong base line, had actually become one of my favourite pieces before meeting Vasks in person. From Vasks's music in general, I imagine mainly achromatic colours, such as black, white and grey. Sometimes in between grey and black, there's a shade of deep blue. Often pale yellow also appears as if to represent the moon. When listening to *Viatore*, I imagine myself being trapped in the deep ocean, sinking into the void. The light that flickers on the water surface gradually becomes out of reach, and the outline of bubbles from my breath do not glister any longer. I imagine death, what it is like to be caged forever in the darkness of a night without the presence of the moon light. Those colours represent emotion, atmosphere and spirituality in my subjective contemplation from the music. Thus, achieving the colours based on *Viatore* has become my material research topic.

## *Synesthesia*

Music has been a source of inspiration for many artistic expressions. As I have been describing already beforehand, I am no exception. While listening to Vasks's music, there have always been images and colours appearing as internal landscapes, sometimes pictorial and sometimes abstract. Strangely this has not occurred to me while listening to other music such as Bach and Mozart. The emotional language of colours and images radiating from Vasks's music have inspired me greatly to develop my art work. In this chapter, I am going to explore the rare phenomenon *synesthesia*, and how it has contributed to developing a new field in art, called visual music. Although clinical synesthesia is thought to be a neurological condition, it will not be investigated further as its connection of colour and sound to creativity has more significant value in my work development.

Richard Cytowic and David Eagleman, pioneer researchers of synesthesia in the field of neurology describe that the term synesthesia derives from Greek words, *syn* (union) and *aisthaesis* (sensation) (Cytowic, Richard E. & Eagleman, David M., 2009, p.1). It literally means 'joined sensation' that one kind of sensory perception may lead to another sensory experience, in other words, for example that music or voice is not only heard by ear but seen by eye simultaneously. It could also be tasted or felt as a physical touch in some cases (ibid). A person who possesses this or similar kind of conditions is called a *synesthete*.

In most cases, colours work as vivid communicative expressions for synesthetes. A notable example is sound to sight synesthesia named *coloured hearing*, that colours or coloured shapes appear in front of their eyes when listening to sounds. Some synesthetes start seeing colours only with certain sounds, for instance music or surrounding everyday environmental sounds such as barking of dogs and voices. Those colours appear like fire works, overlapping with solid



objects that they look at (ibid. p.87-88). Cytowic and Eagleman refer to a synesthete, Rebecca Price, who describes how she likes her husbands' voice and laugh that are coloured with golden brown like a buttery toast (ibid, p.39). It is hard to imagine for those who do not possess these cross-sensory perceptions what it is like to be a synesthete. It is as if being able to see rays of ultraviolet which are not perceivable by mankind but by birds and bees (ibid, p.20). Synesthetes often do not realise that they are experiencing something unusual as they are born with the condition and never have lived a life without it. Cytowic and Eagleman continue that:

What synesthetes see is not pictorial and elaborate but rather simple and elementary [...] whereas nonsynesthetes might picture a pastoral landscape while listening to Beethoven, for example, synesthetes will see coloured lines or moving geometric shapes.

(ibid, p.14)

This suggests there is a significant difference between genuine synesthetes and those who elaborate the idea of synesthesia as metaphoric or artistic expressions such as Georgia O'Keeffe who painted colourful abstract paintings inspired by music (ibid, p.13, Fig. 4). While the latter relies on imaginations or emotional language triggered by music, the former does not attempt to seek or long for inspirational moments when listening to music or sound. Instead, their unique visions appear constantly through life and they have to bear even when they do not wish to perceive those extra sensory perceptions.



Fig. 4: Blue and Green Music, 1921 by Georgia O'Keeffe

The French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908- 1992) was a notable synesthete. He was able to both see or read music as colours and hear colours as music. His compositions are sometimes based on seeing landscapes and the colours within them were translated into musical notes (ibid, p.94). The musicologist, Olivia Mattis, quotes Messiaen's life with synesthesia as follows:

One of the great dramas of my life consists of my telling people that I see colours whenever I hear music, and they see nothing, nothing at all. That's terrible. And they don't even believe me. [...] When I hear music - and it was already like that when I was a child - I see colours. Chords are expressed in terms of colour for me - for example, a yellowish orange with a reddish tinge<sup>2</sup>. [...]

(Mattis 2005, p.211)

Cytowic and Eagleman note that in the field of neuroscience, the notion of synesthesia started to be recognised at the dawn of twentieth century. It sparked interests and discussions not only for neurologists but also for artists, writers and composers (ibid, p.15-16). Coloured hearing, as evident in the Messiaen's case, was seen as the special ability that creative individuals longed to possess. In the field of art, Jeremy Strick, the American art historian, mentions that 'the idea of synesthesia served to meditate between music and visual art in the early twentieth century and proved essential for the development of abstraction' (Strick 2005, p.16). A notable example being fine art paintings that started to shift from pictorial and realistic to a new way of expression that emulates the quality of music (Zilczer 2005, p.35).

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2. Mattis mentions Messiaen's visit to a theatre when a piece of Beethoven's music was played while the venue was lit up with violet coloured light. He was very disturbed by that particular colour as the music and colour did not match with his perception (Mattis 2005, p.225).

## *Visual Music*

*The idea behind colour music, for both painters and composers, was that the two arts of music and painting, which normally occupy the nonintersecting domains of time and space, could somehow be merged to induce a feeling of transcendence - the "poetic" response- in the listener/viewer.*  
(Mattis 2005, p. 213)

The art historian, Judith Zilczer, states that Roger Fry, the English Post-Impressionism painter, was one of the first to invent the term *visual music* when describing works of art that 'gave up all resemblance to natural form, and create a purely abstract language of form-a visual music' (Zilczer 2005, p.25). In the book, *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900*, it is explained that the term visual music is used for framing visual art that embraces the idea of coloured hearing synesthesia within different art movements that occurred in the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, such as Expressionism, Orphism, Futurism, Synchronism and Vorticism (Brougher 2005, p.10 and p.105). It is sometimes called *colour music* that suggests a direct linkage to coloured hearing synesthesia. Visual music includes works from artists who are synesthetes as well as non-synesthetes. Due to its lack of objective reports dealing with synesthetes' experiences, it has been difficult to recognise who possessed real conditions of synesthesia. Although it is questionable, Cytowic and Eagleman, state that amongst painters, Wassily Kandinsky (Fig.5) must have been a clinical synesthete (Cytowic, Richard E. & Eagleman, David M., 2009, p.13).

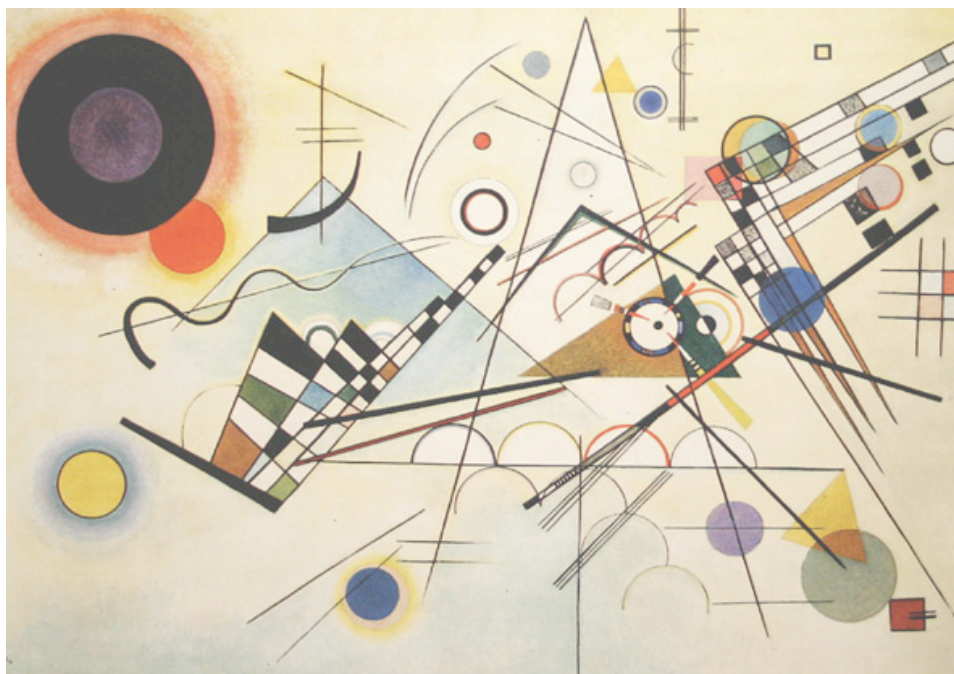


Fig. 5: Composition VIII, 1923 by Wassily Kandinsky

While synesthetes' art has direct connections to their sensory visions, non-synesthetes' art is often based on colours, lines and structures that evoke atmospheric similarities of music. Cytowic and Eagleman refer to Dr. Lawrence Marks, who conducted a research of perceptions of colours in relation to music, between synesthetes and non-synesthetes. According to Marks's research, both groups showed similar results that higher notes are brighter colours and lower notes are darker. (ibid, p.104). Colour psychology plays a significant role in nonsynesthetes' artistic expression. The Japanese colour theorist Tadasu Oyama, refers to the colour psychologist Kenya Yoshino's research for non-synesthetes. He asked the participants to choose colours from a sixteen colour palette, that matched with some well-known classical music:

Beethoven (Symphony No.5, Fate) - black, red, grey  
 Beethoven (Symphony No.6, Pastorale) - yellow green, white, green  
 Vivaldi (Four Seasons, Winter) - blue, purplish blue, grey  
 Vivaldi (Four Seasons, Spring) - yellow green, white, yellow, green  
 Smetana (The Moldau) - grey, blue-green, blue  
 (Yoshino in Oyama 1994, p.225-226)

This suggests that feelings that derive from music and colour work reciprocally. Titling of music also influences non-synesthetes' imagination. For example, when hearing the word *Pastorale*, even without music, we are able to visually picture green fields and calming blue sky in our mind. Visual artists also applied this technique of using titles of music, for instance, Symphony No.1 or Sonata No.2 so that the viewer is able to acknowledge where the artist's inspiration comes from.

According to Zilczer, colour theory also triggered non-synesthetes for seeking rationalised method of expressing music in painting. For instance, Sir Isaac Newton's invention of the colour wheel in seventeenth century, and his application of seven colours of the Newtonian spectrum to the seven notes of the diatonic scale, was used as a mapping tool by visual artists. This later contributed to the development of colour organ and light art. (Zilczer 2005, p.35, Fig. 6)



Fig. 6: Newton's colour scale

## *Colour Psychology*

*The meaning of a word to me - is not as exact as the meaning of a color.*

*Colors and shapes make more definite statements than words.*

(Georgia O'Keeffe in Riley II 1995, p. 171)

We live our everyday life surrounded by colours. Without even realising, due to symbolic connotations that colour possesses and evokes, one's life style, character and feelings are often governed by colour. People have favourite colours that can also narrate their personalities just by looking at them. According to the colour consultant Frank H. Mahnke, the definition of psychology is 'the science that deals with the mind, with mental and emotional processes (Mahnke 1996, p.6)'. Those processes include conscious, subconscious and unconscious experiences that effect our behavior, thoughts, and feelings (ibid). Mahnke refers to the psychologist Ulrich Beer who talks about the effect of colour on mankind:

Seldom, surely, is the psychological part of an appearance in nature so great as it is in the case of colour. No one can encounter it and stay neutral. We are immediately, instinctively, and emotionally moved. We have sympathy or antipathy, pleasure or disapproval within us as soon as we perceive colours.

(Ulrich Beer in Mahnke 1996, p.6)

Generally colours are perceived with symbolisations that are universal. Such as red being the colour for passion and white being purity. Due to our tastes and preferences, language of colours can be addressed both subjectively and objectively. Artists have often used colours consciously as their language of communication. Mahnke mentions Paul Cézanne who felt that colours 'were personified ideas; they have personality and life'. Another painter Paul Gauguin was also aware of the powerful emotional impact that colour yields upon individuals (ibid, p.8).

I am not a synesthete in the clinical sense, and therefore I do not picture fireworks of colours when a dog barks, nor see aurora-like images in front of my eyes when a musical melody plays. My expression from music depends highly on imagination, thus dissimilar to what Messiaen or other synesthetes perceive. Zilczer refers to another painter, Arthur Dove who believed that 'painting could attain the emotive power of music' (Zlicker 2005, p.62). I agree with Dove's statement, and I strive to achieve the same characteristic through my art work. In my opinion, after seeing many paintings from synesthetes and non-synesthetes in the book *Visual Music*, I feel that the sense of sound radiates more strikingly from those of non-synesthetes such as O'Keeffe and Dove. That is probably due to the use of colour chosen sensitively and carefully as a vehicle to deliver emotional values of music. As professional artists, they searched for a universal language through colour that pervaded and communicated to the heart of general public. It feels as though another spiritual dimension has been created in the air between the painting and the viewer. However, there was one aspect that was missing from the visual music paintings. It is the notion of transience which is a key element evident in music. As opposed to paintings that are caged in a fixed time, music when performed, becomes a time based medium that alters constantly like a steam of water. Expressing time in paintings has been a difficult issue, even though the viewer is free to interpret a painting as a moving image in their imagination. Visual artists have instead started utilising new media such as films as means of expressing time (Strick 2005, p.19). This has also become one of the challenging elements for my artistic development.



As colour psychology is a vast field to investigate, I narrow down to the effects of colours; that are evident from monochromatic painters, Ad Reinhardt and Yves Klein. Reinhardt mentioned the symbolisms of colours in his auto-biographical and dogmatic writing, *Art-as-Art*. Due to my preference on minimal style of work, I found his paintings and writing inspirational both for developing the colours and shapes for my work development.

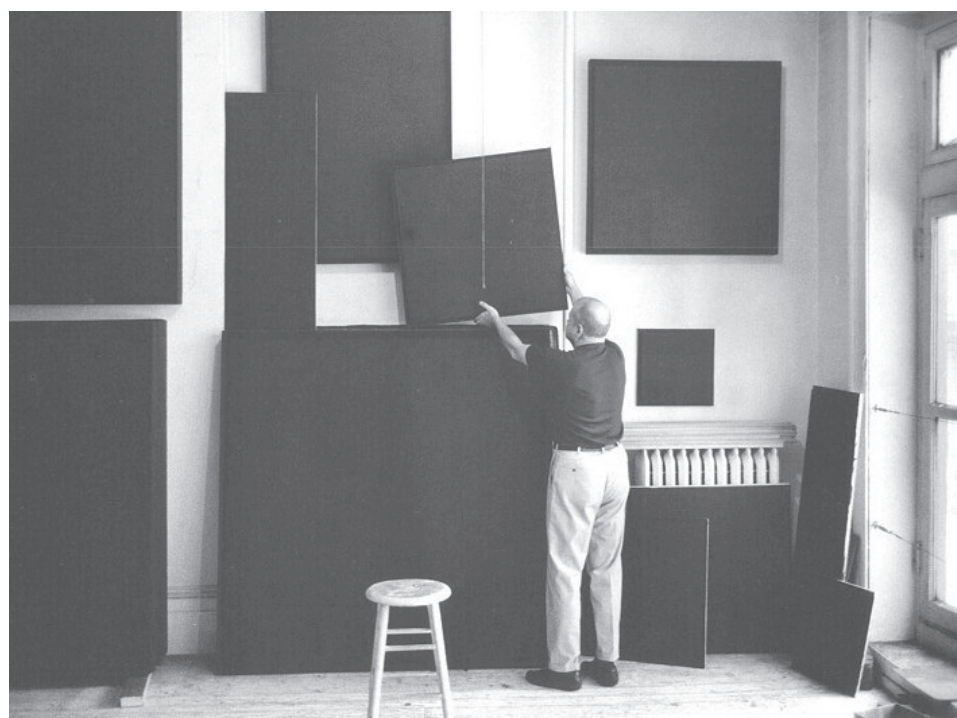


Fig. 7: Ad Reinhardt

## *Ad Reinhardt*

Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) is best known as the painter who painted black. Although he was reluctant to be grouped into particular art movements, he is generally called the Abstract Expressionist or Minimalist painter by art critics. He was a man of many gifted skills. With his education in philosophy and art history, he was also known as a writer, illustrator and cartoonist. The selection of writings by Reinhardt is collated in a book *Art-as-Art*, edited by the art critic Barbara Rose. Rose states that 'Reinhardt wrote as he painted' (Rose 1991, p.3). Unlike myself, who gains knowledge from working directly with the material without any prior preparations such as sketches, Reinhardt wrote piles after piles of his ideas and thoughts, not only for art but also for politics, religion, art history and so on. He used those writings as his aesthetic dogmas. From the early fifties until his death, he devoted his time only to black paintings, and then from the early sixties, his black paintings became only of one size, square, five feet by five feet (Reinhardt 1991, p.11, Fig. 7). A researcher of minimalism, Edward Strickland comments, that at a first glance, the painting looks just black, yet after a while, it starts to reveal that it is made up of a grid structure of *nine-squares-within-a-square* format. His black was made with a mixture of red, green and blue. He was interested in all-over painting, only of matte black. With his extreme pursuit, layers and layers he painted until he eliminated any slight texture or sheen, as if the paintings were not permitted to induce any feelings within themselves. After patiently observing the painting, it becomes noticeable that corners are painted with slightly higher content of red, and middle with green, also the borders of the nine squares unveil a very subtle line of a cross. This evokes spiritual and religious perspectives, yet Reinhardt rejected the idea of a cross which is seen as the icon of Christianity. Rather, he claimed that he was inspired by the composition of Mandala paintings (Strickland 1993, p.47).

It deviates slightly, yet this kind of a patience-taking observation reminds me of one exhibition of the light artist, James Turrell in Nao Island, Japan. His work *Backside of the moon* was showcased in a house designed by the renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando. On arriving, I was told to wait, then went inside the building that had absolutely no light. In the darkness I was told to walk along with my left hand on the wall until I found a bench where I could be seated with other audience. Then we waited for five minutes in silence. Gradually I began seeing a very dark blue light in front and slightly white lights on the sides. Eventually the black contours of people became visible as well. The atmosphere was surreal and mystic, and was a very unique experience compared to other exhibitions I had visited. Before going to this exhibition, I had happened to visit one of his other exhibitions in Frankfurt, yet at that time, I did not know how to perceive the work. I remember feeling feared not knowing what was in the dark room and I stood where there was light. In the end I did not dare going inside, which I now terribly regret. Art is communicative, therefore contemplative and freely interpretable by individuals. Stories interpreted could often alter completely from the artist's intention.

In *Art-as-Art*, Reinhardt wrote immensely about black as a symbol and concept. In comparison with white, he refers to black's symbolic meanings that must have emerged from the Bible, such as good vs evil, heaven vs hell, light vs dark. Those associations are embedded in our cultural behavior and are universally acknowledged. Although Reinhardt continues that he would eliminate those religiously symbolic meanings as an artist and talks about how he is interested in black as a non-colour and absence of colour, as darkness (Reinhardt 1991, p.86-88). Using black as darkness is seen in Asian art such as Chinese ink paintings. Timelessness, monotony, inaction, detachment, expressionlessness, clarity, quietness, dignity, and negativity that emerge from black are the keywords that he believes to be the essence of Asian art (Strickland 1993, p.48). He particularly talks about his interest in the negativeness of black or darkness (Reinhardt 1991, p.87). Philosophy of Buddhism was also one of his influential facets, which I continue discussing later in the Japanese aesthetics section.

The shape, square, that he preferred, is the basic geometric form. Josef Albers states that square is the simplest non-organic, non-allusive form compared to circle which may be seen as to have connotations to sun or moon etc (Strickland 1993, p.49). The extracted quote below from *Art-as-Art*, seemed to capture appropriately his perception of form and colour, which later becomes influential for deciding shapes for my art work:

A square (*neutral, shapeless*) canvas, five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man's outstretched arms (*not large, not small, sizeless*), trisected (*no composition*), one horizontal form negating one vertical form (*formless, no top, no bottom, directionless*), three (*more or less*) dark (*lightless*) no-contrasting (*colorless*) colors, brushwork brushed out to remove brushwork, a matte, flat, free-hand painted surface (*glossless, textureless, non-linear, no hard edge, no soft edge*) which does not reflect its surroundings - a pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting - an object that is self-conscious (*no unconsciousness*) ideas, transcendent, aware of no thing but art (*absolutely no anti-art*).

(Reinhardt 1991, p.82-83)

Reinhardt's approach towards painting is described by the artist and critic, Brian O'Doherty, that 'Reinhardt has not reduced art to its limits. He has reduced visibility of its limits (Strickland 1993, p.49)'. With the size, and form that do not attain particular attention, his paintings were made to be abstracted further by the viewer. Upon observing the painting that emits subtle and dull radiance of black, the viewer is drawn to merge into the ocean of darkness which is merely perceivable to the committed few.

## Yves Klein

### *Seen from Space, the Earth is blue*

Yuri Gagarin, quoted by Yves Klein (Restany 1982, p.7)

Yves Klein (1928-1962), was the French artist undoubtedly known for his monochrome Klein Blue paintings (Fig.8). Despite his brief life, his charismatic characteristic of a natural entertainer enabled him to gain fame for his paintings as well as for his audacious pursuit of performance art such as *Anthropométries*. Unlike Reinhardt, Klein's approach towards the colour, blue, is an intimate and instinctive one, stating, 'it was in 1947, that I had the idea, the conscious vision of monochrome. (Klein in Strickland 1993, p.34)'. The moment occurred as he was lying on a beach in Nice, looking at the sky with no cloud. As Ronald Hunt describes, 'the huge dome of blue sky arching above him became his greatest art work. But birds flying across it flawed its purity: Birds must be eliminated. Thus we humans will possess the right to levitate in an effective and total physical freedom (ibid)'. Klein talks about blue as the symbol of the sea and the sky that stretches on like the endless space, therefore provides no dimensions. His paintings were rectangular, that is a common shape for windows from which one is free to traverse in the unlimited expansion of the sky (Restany 1982, p.14).

During his career as an artist, he experimented with various methods for creating paintings, sculptures and performances. One which I was interested in is the *monotone symphony* that was used as an accompaniment for his monochrome exhibition. Literally, the music was composed of one single note played successively by orchestra. Klein's statement; 'line goes to infinity, but color is infinity' matches logically with the composition that leads the space into the same sphere of paintings, of the sky (ibid, p.16).



Fig.8: IKB 79, 1959 © Tate, London 2013

It is said that Klein was influenced from Japanese Zen Buddhism through his practice of *Judo*. In my opinion, however, that from his paintings, the sense is not as perceivable as Reinhardt's. It seems that it reflected upon his mindset, but it was not expressed clearly in the art work, rather, his thoughts were the accumulation of all religiosity that he encountered often haphazardly throughout his life. The art critic Pierre Restany states that 'Klein was not systematic in his mystical recipes. [...] He adopted his own, fully aware of what he was doing (ibid, p.19)'. His spontaneity and pursuit for trials is praised of. His sudden death made him a legendary spirit that transcended through the sky to the infinity of his blue.





## Indigo Blue

Black for Reinhardt, blue for Klein, for me, indigo blue is the most intimate of all colours (Fig.9). As mentioned earlier, because of my name being fields of indigo blue, it straightforwardly symbolises my being. When the Klein Blue is the colour of the sea and sky, indigo blue is associated with the deep sea and night sky which connects to my inner visual experiences from Vasks's music. Although I have been developing indigo blue with glazes, I had never explored the field of indigo for textiles. Up to this point, I was not fully aware of historical nor religious implications. The more I gained knowledge on the process as well as its social impacts, I became more attracted by the mystical quality of the colour itself.

Historically, dyestuffs were made from naturally occurring plants with a few exception of insect dyes. The process of making indigo vat<sup>3</sup> differs completely to the normal plant dyes which needs boiling and adding mordants to fix the colour onto a fabric. Indigo is made from several plants found all around the world that contain the chromatophore called *indican* that is insoluble in water (Balfour-Paul 1998, p.89). Although the regions of indigo production have been scattered, the principle method remains almost identical. In short, there are three important stages for making the indigo workable as a vat. First, to decompose the plant, second to produce the alkali solution known as lye water historically made with wood ash, and third, to create an oxygen reduced liquid solution by feeding it with sugar, bran, or with an oxygen-reducing agent such as lime (Miller 1984, p.24). It is a mysterious achievement of chemistry, that when a fabric is taken out from the vat, exposed to oxygen, the yellowish-brown colour gradually turns to blue. After many dippings, different gradations

Fig.9: Indigo dyed textiles at Aino Favén's studio

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3. Liquid solution for dyeing

of blues can be obtained. As it is time consuming to produce darker shades of indigo, being able to wear dark indigo clothes represented wealth and prosperity. In recent times, the mysterious chemistry has been uncovered and synthetic indigo became widespread, notably with Levi Strauss's jeans (Balfour-Paul 1998, p.203-205). Yet, as the Japanese proverb says, the difference between the two is like 'moon and turtle', and natural indigo is still cherished for its colour rich in variations (ibid, p.132).

The oldest archeological findings of indigo dates back to third millennium BC (Balfour-Paul 1998, p.12). Since then, the blue colour that unified mankind with surrounding nature was revered amongst dyers and praised as luxurious and noble colour. The researcher of indigo, Jenny Balfour-Paul, also talks about indigo's symbolic associations for rituals and ceremonial events, due to its enigmatic colour transformation. It synchronised with life, especially with death in some cultures. Therefore, indigo coloured textiles have been worn in mourning ceremonies amongst many tribes (ibid, p.179-180). The distinctive smell of putrefaction from the indigo vat also links with the odour of death. Those characteristics similar to human life possess connotations to the spiritual metamorphosis.

The reoccurring cycle of the living on earth, is reminiscent in Vasks's music, *Viatore*. With a melody played in sequence, Vasks expressed how one's life sprouts, prospers, and then deceases back into the earth, the origin of all being. This also links with the Buddhism ideology of reincarnation.

Another aspect that I found inspiring is the temporality of colours seen in indigo and other natural dyed textiles. The author of Japanese aesthetics, Junichiro Tanizaki states that the elegance in objects is obtained with the past, and that is what makes it worthier of admiration (Tanizaki 1991, p.20). After being used and exposed under the sun for many years, colour becomes subdued and cherishable, each possessing unique memories within.

Having explored some influential facets, I have come across ideas that strongly connected to the Japanese aesthetics, such as Ad Reinhardt's painting and the symbolism of indigo blue. In the next chapter, I continue investigating the aesthetics further.

## *Japanese Aesthetics*

Consciously and subconsciously, I have been influenced by the auto-ethnographical background, by the Japanese aesthetics. It is embedded deeply in mind that it affects my work in terms of composition, structure and spatiality.

The Japanologist, Donald Keene states that the perception of what is uniquely Japanese is represented in artefacts such as tea bowls used in Japanese tea ceremony. Although the Japanese have been producing artefacts that are highly decorative and perfectly symmetric, he states that the rustic and humble tea bowls symbolise the Japanese aesthetics known as *wabi-sabi* (Keene 1972, p.59-60). Daisetsu T. Suzuki (1870-1966), the author of religious studies in Japan, also states that 'poverty, *sabi* or *wabi*, simplification, aloneness and cognate ideas make up the most conspicuous and characteristic features of Japanese art and culture. (Suzuki in Hirota 1995, p.45)'. In this chapter, I would like to unveil rather unfamiliar terms, *Yuubi*, *Mujo* and *Yugen*, which were established before the initiation of *wabi-sabi*. Those notions were crystalised from an amalgamation of religious beliefs that were both native and foreign to the Japanese.

Japan's mountainous topography contributed in forming picturesque and mystic landscapes. Nature that has generated the prosperity and cultivation of mankind, also possessed menacing power that devastated the life of mankind. As a result, since the pre-historic times, the Japanese were naturally convinced to have animistic and polytheistic beliefs called Shintoism, (神道, literally translated as *the way of God*) that all the surrounding living creatures embraced spiritual values. The aesthetic derived from perceiving beauty in things that are natural and organic is called *Yuubi* 優美. This perception has been the fundamental component in the Japanese aesthetics even after the emergence of Buddhism took place (Miyamoto 2008, p.39-85).

*Incessant is the change of water  
where the stream glides on calmly:  
the spray appears over a cataract,  
yet vanishes without a moment's delay*

Kamono Chomei (1155 -1216), Hojoki  
translated by Natsume 1924, p.337

From a Euro-centric view, Japan is geographically located at the Far East of the Eurasian Continent. Therefore, historically, it has been the terminus island where different cultures and religions have sailed the ocean and stagnated. Buddhism was introduced in Japan in the sixth century. The most significant aspect of Buddhism that had contributed in enriching the Japanese aesthetics is the notion of reincarnating birth and death (Miyamoto 2008, p.82,83). With this thought, the feared phenomena of death was made to be believed as deliverance to the afterlife. As mentioned on the left, Kamono Chomei metaphorically describes the impermanent and transient state of life, called *Mujo*. It represents vanity and ephemerality of mankind and all the living creatures on earth. Another poet, Kenko Yoshida states that, 'beauty is indissolubly bound to its perishability (Keene 1998, p.xxii)'. Cherry blossoms in particular, are regarded as the centre of admiration in Japan, because of the transitory nature that equals with the ideology. Fearing death only brings pain to one's mind. Instead, the pessimistic notion of *Mujo* allows to accept and embrace the evanescence manifested in life, therefore one is able to attain peace of mind.

Another notable aesthetic is the beauty perceived through negative space or emptiness, called *Yugen* 幽玄, literally translated as *the gateway to the afterlife*. The term originates from a Japanese Renga poetry when several people gather and compose poems in sequence. In between poems, the successor should seek for profound meanings from the metaphorical verses created previously. Shinkei (1406-1475), the Buddhist monk and poet, left some instructions for Renga stating:

Be ever wakeful in your heart to the true nature of the dream of this  
world and your mind of illusion, conduct yourself with gentleness, and  
let your mind be drawn to the profound and subtle.

(Shinkei in Hirota 1995, p.173)

Those profound and subtle feelings are what Chomei summarises as the invisible and mystic atmosphere that emerge from what is unwritten and unseen (Miyamoto 2008, p.93). The aesthetic of *Yugen* was later applied and developed as spatial awareness in other forms of art, such as in paintings and flower

arrangement. For instance, in Japanese paintings, instead of filling in every detail with pictorial sceneries, negative space that is often painted in black is used and this allows the viewer to contemplate with their imagination. Ad Reinhardt, as mentioned earlier, took this approach to the extreme and utilised the negative space entirely for abstraction.

Personally, the spatial awareness and perceiving the invisible from visible, is what I consider important in my art work. In terms of the thesis development, to endow the notion of impermanence and transience will be the main field of exploration.

The mission from this point onwards is to investigate how those previous influences could be reflected upon my creation of the art work. I have already found one method of using textile dye as means of expressing transience and colours that emerged from the music of Vasks. The question remains in the utilisation of ceramics and I would like to start by narrating a story from my apprenticeship in Korea, as part of my subjective contemplation.

*After all,  
we are all made up of particles  
of dust.*

Hyang-Jong Oh  
in South Korea, Spring 2011

## *Interlude - Korea and Japan trip -*

In Spring 2012, I had a chance to visit South Korea to work as an apprentice for a traditional ceramic artist, Hyang-Jong Oh. He was one of the demonstrators at the International Ceramics Festival in Aberystwyth in UK in 2011, which I participated as a volunteer. He later asked me if I was interested in working at his studio in South Korea, thus I decided to go there for two months in March and April 2012. He is a maker of large scale vessels called Onggi, used in Korea for preserving food. At his studio, I mainly learnt his technique of making clay slabs by hand. In between making pottery, he often visited ceramic museums, factories and schools, therefore I was able to gain knowledge on traditional Korean ceramic techniques. Although it was a tough experience keeping up with his routines, the overall experience was very fruitful and inspirational. After the apprenticeship, I also visited Japanese ceramic villages, studios and galleries. My brain was overwhelmed and overloaded with ceramic art for a while (more detailed story is included in the appendix, p.102-103).

Observing different approaches to ceramics from the journey made me feel that I should develop an art work with a method that I personally had never encountered before in the field of ceramics. After returning from the journey, being lost with ideas, I spent about a month just contemplating. I thought, walked and watched skies and stars, hoping to have the moment of new ideas descending from above.

One day during this period of contemplation, I had a discussion with one of my tutors, Pekka Paikkari, the ceramic artist working at Arabia Art Department. Upon showing him a slideshow of my thesis topic, he commented on one slide which stated, *ceramics+sound+emotion*, as keywords for my thesis development. He asked why I kept using the term ceramics. Somehow, on hearing that question, I felt that grey clouds in my mind started to clear gradually. I realised that ceramics is a generalised word that frames all art that utilises clay as a material. From this day, re-defining of the term ceramics became necessary to progress forward.

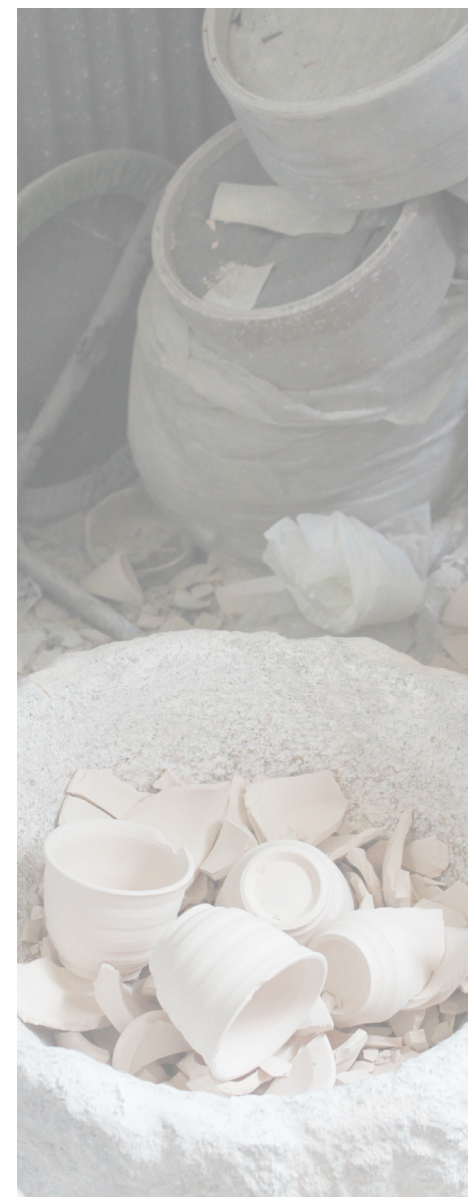
## *Clay / Ceramics*

Clay is a versatile material. It comes naturally from the earth that we live on and has been part of civilizations for thousands of years for producing domestic, as well as sculptural objects. From everyday life, industrially produced tableware, bricks, tiles, sinks and toilets are noticeable wares made of clay. It is also used for making knives, some parts of airplanes and space shuttles for its rigid character. Archeologically, clay was used for creating relics for worship in prehistoric times. Those objects that weathered, yet remained to this day clearly show the power of heat that makes clay a permanent material. Domestic tools such as bowls and plates were made since the development of agriculture from 10000 to 8000 B.C (Mattison 2003, p.1) It is still used at present and keeps developing its use with advanced technologies.

In stratigraphy, the ceramic artist and researcher, David Scott describes, that clay is made of the decomposition of volcanic rock which, after many years of weathering process, becomes smaller particles of alumina and silica, that are necessary ingredients for forming clay. Molecules of silica and alumina bond together with water and create a layer of plastic stratum in soil (ibid, p.16, Fig. 10). The plasticity of clay enables us to create any form both functional and artistic (Fig.11).

After shapes have been finalised, the next stage is to undergo a firing process in order to stiffen the material. This process nowadays is normally done twice, first to 900°C, then second to 1280°C. The volatilisation of water occurs at 100°C then at 573°C, the structure of silica changes, resulting in increasing its size one percent (Quartz inversion) (ibid, p.56). A clay body fired below 573°C dissolves back into water, yet above 573 °C remain insoluble. The firing range between 600°C to 900°C is called a bisque or biscuit firing. It literally means that clay becomes like a biscuit that is easily breakable by hand (Fig.12,14). Bisqueware is porous and glazes are applied to those before taking them to higher firing, called glost or glaze firing. From 950°C onwards, vitrification, in other words,





Left / Fig. 10: Local clay, South Korea  
 Right / Fig. 11: Making clay, South Korea

Left / Fig. 12: Bisqueware, Japan  
 Right / Fig. 13: Kiln site, South Korea





glassification of clay takes place (ibid, p.56). Notably, the translucent body of porcelain is the result of this vitrification. The sound of fired clay changes accordingly to firing temperatures. The resonance of high fired clay (1250°C-) is reminiscent of sound from metallic materials, whereas the sound of non-vitrified bisqueware does not resonate. Once high fired, clay remains permanently as in the figure 13 in page 53, that shows the residue of the kiln site which was believed to be five hundred to six hundred years old. Technically, the term ceramics is used for artefacts made of clay, that have undergone the high-firing process, and therefore applies to those that are permanent.

#### Summary:

Volcanic rock turns to clay after years of weathering process.

General heating temperature

(0 - around 600°C) - Clay dissolves into water (technically below 573°C)

(600°C - 1100°C) - Clay does not dissolve but absorbs water (porous)

(1100°C - ) - Clay becomes vitrified and water resistant.

Clay + no heat = greenware

Clay + low heat = bisque ware, earthenware - perishable

Clay + high heat = ceramics, porcelain, stoneware - permanent

Having reinvestigated the different processes of clay, and having considered how to express transience in ceramics, I became interested in the bisqueware that are fragile and biodegradable. Also its porous character would be suitable for testing with textile dyes. At the same time, I found an article about Indian chai cups. It said that in India, it is common to use clay cups that are only bisque fired for drinking chai tea as disposable cups. Once used, those chai cups get thrown away on streets, crashed in smithereens to merge back into the earth again (Chai Pilgrimage 2008).

Fig. 14: Bisqueware, South Korea



## *Technical development*

Based on the subjective contemplation I have sought for ways of expressing my inner landscapes through a ceramic art work using natural textile dyeing. I also have decided on utilising bisqueware as means to express transience. From this point, my writing shifts to the technical development which is dependent on photographic documentations.

Here are the list of technical developments:

1. Mold making
2. Production of test tiles
3. Firing tiles at different temperatures
4. Porosity test
5. Colour testing
6. Exhibition
7. Comments and evaluations

Right: Colouring test with logwood







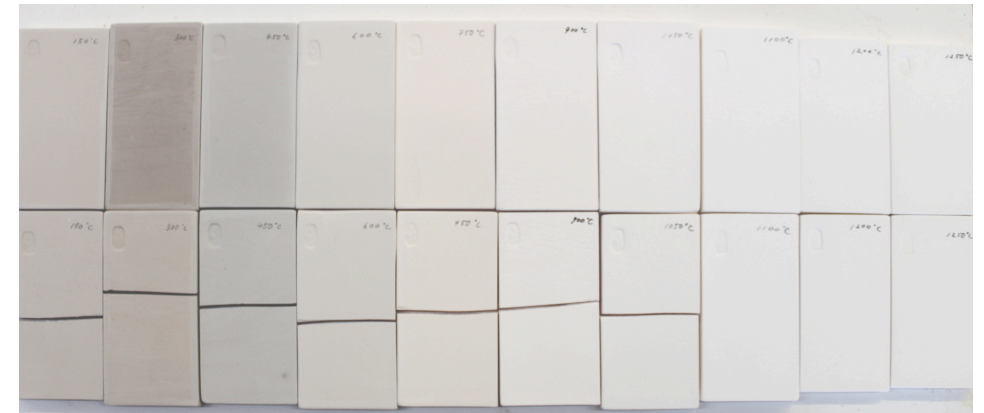
## 1. Mold making

Prior to testing with textile dyes, I prepared test tiles for colouring by making plaster molds to cast sheets of clay tiles.



## 2. Production of test tiles

The clay slip used throughout the production was kindly sponsored by Matti Sorsa from Arabia. It is called Vitri-Porcelain which is stoneware with a high content of ball clay that reveals a dark colour in the clay body.



## 3. Firing tiles at different temperatures

From left: 150 / 300 / 450 / 600 / 750 / 900 / 1050 / 1100 / 1200 / 1250 °c

Tiles below 1100°c are breakable by hand.

Colours change from grey - pink - white.

Grey and white tiles are suitable as a background colour.

Tiles below 600°c dissolved into water.

Tiles above 1200°c did not seem to have absorbed water.



#### 4. Porosity test

The porosity test was conducted manually simply by boiling the tiles for about an hour. The weight was measured before and after boiling.

The result showed that the water was absorbed the most at 900 - 1050°C. Due to kilns' technical issue, it seemed that I failed to keep the firing temperatures exact. Therefore I asked Maaria Pyörteinen from Arabia to conduct the test by using their equipments. (see the table / image above) Below 1050°C was done manually by myself, and above 1050°C at Arabia.

temperature (°C)	weight with water (g)	weight without water (g)	water weight (g)	porosity (%)
150	-	-	-	-
300	-	-	-	-
450	-	-	-	-
600	54.4	47.1	7.3	15.5
750	53.2	45.5	7.7	16.9
900	56.9	48.4	8.5	17.6
1050	51.2	43.5	7.7	17.7
1067	18.5271	15.9142	2.6129	16.4
1085	18.4035	16.1240	2.2795	14.1
1098	16.5765	14.7666	1.8099	12.3
1109	18.5402	16.6734	1.8668	11.2
1121	18.4692	16.7292	1.7400	10.4
1133	16.4110	14.9636	1.4474	9.7
1146	16.7633	15.3090	1.4543	9.5
1158	16.7442	15.3570	1.3872	9.0
1170	16.6443	15.3771	1.2672	8.2
1184	16.1023	14.9947	1.1076	7.4
1195	17.0993	16.3176	0.7817	4.8
1210	16.1908	15.4552	0.7356	4.8
1220	17.0993	16.5698	0.7640	4.6
1232	15.9342	15.8294	0.1048	0.7
1243	15.6447	15.6313	0.0134	0.1
1253	14.5666	14.5613	0.0053	0

#### 5. Colour testing

Along with the production of test tiles, I sought for help from Eeva Heikkinen, the studio supervisor at the textile department, for testing indigo. Unfortunately, natural indigo dying was not available for experiments, therefore she showed me the method with synthetic powdered indigo instead. The recipe for the synthetic indigo was written by Maija Pellonpää-Forss, one of the lecturers in Aalto ARTS. The following in page 62 is the recipe used for the first trial.



Maija Pellonpää-Forss's recipe for the synthetic indigo dye  
(Translated from Forss, 1994, p.139,140)

1. Making of a stock solution (concentrated vat)

hot water	2dl
indigo powder	20g
sodium hydroxide NaOH(38° B'e)	39ml
sodium dithionite	20g

- Wear gloves. Mix the indigo in a highly ventilated area.
- Add boiled water to indigo. Stir well, but avoid getting air into the liquid.
- Add sodium hydroxide.
- Add sodium dithionite.
- Wait for 30 minutes. While waiting, keep the temperature at 50°c.
- After 30 hour, a flower-like pattern should be floating on the vat.

2. Adding water to the stock solution

water 30°c	1 litre
sodium hydroxide NaOH(38° B'e)	0.125ml
sodium dithionite	0.25g
(glouber salt)	25g

3. Dyeing

- For the first dipping, dip for 5 to 10 minutes.
- Rinse well with water.
- When taking the fabric, wait until the colour changes to blue.
- Between dippings, wait for 10 to 30 minutes.
- From the second dip, wait 1 minute for the each dipping.  
(Indigo starts to peel off if dipped for too long)
- 4 dippings of synthetic indigo is equal to 20 dippings with natural indigo.

Photos on the right are taken at Aalto ARTS.



1. Wear gloves
2. Scaling indigo powder
3. Surface of indigo vat
4. Dipping a fabric
5. After rinsing with water, expose to the air for oxidation
6. After oxidation
7. Testing with tiles
8. Waiting for oxidation
9. After rinsing with water





## 5. Colour testing (continued)

After the experiment with synthetic indigo, my interest was all the more drawn to the natural indigo, as the synthetic colour was attained too easily and did not bring out variations of colours noticeable from natural indigo.

Fortunately soon after the previous experiment, I had a chance to meet Aino Favén, the Finnish textile artist who kindly offered to hold a workshop of natural indigo dyeing. It was a rainy autumn day when I visited her studio in Oulunkylä. Leaves were turning to vermillion and the air was scented with apples fallen from the trees (Fig.15). Before we started testing with the natural indigo, she showed me samples of dyes she had tested previously. Those included plant dyes as well as a purple insect dye called cochineal. Sometimes she used darker threads such as natural wool that was pale grey for dyeing. This inspired me to utilise the natural colour of clay as a background (Fig.16).

Favén mentioned that it is extremely difficult to create an indigo vat with only natural ingredients. She used chemicals such as sodium dithionite and sodium hydroxide for the vat with natural indigo ball from Africa. She continued that the colour is prone to fade and she would normally add more chemicals to fix the indigo to textiles, yet we decided not to add them as I was interested more in seeing the colour fade. The result of natural indigo was more varied in comparison to the synthetic ones. After the experiment, I spent a few days observing how colours were changing when exposed to sunlight.

Fig. 15: Aino Favén's studio

Next page / Fig 16: Favén's samples of colour





MÄNNYNKÄVYT  
(TUORE) 1000 %  
3  
INDIGO

INDIGO



Aino Favén's recipe with African natural indigo

1. Making of a stock solution (concentrated vat)

water 50°c	500ml
natural indigo	30g
sodium hydroxide NaOH(25%)	50ml
sodium dithionite	30g

- Grind indigo.
- Add water 50°c to indigo. Stir well, but avoid getting air into the liquid.
- Add sodium hydroxide.
- Add sodium dithionite.
- Wait for 1 hour. While waiting, keep the temperature at 50°c.
- After 1 hour, a flower-like pattern should be floating on the vat.

2. Adding water to the stock solution

water 20-24°c	10 litre
powdered gelatin	2g
sodium hydroxide NaOH(25%)	2ml
sodium dithionite	3g
salt	200g

- Add the stock solution to the 10 litres of water.
- for pale
- for medium 10ml
- for strong 50ml
- 250ml

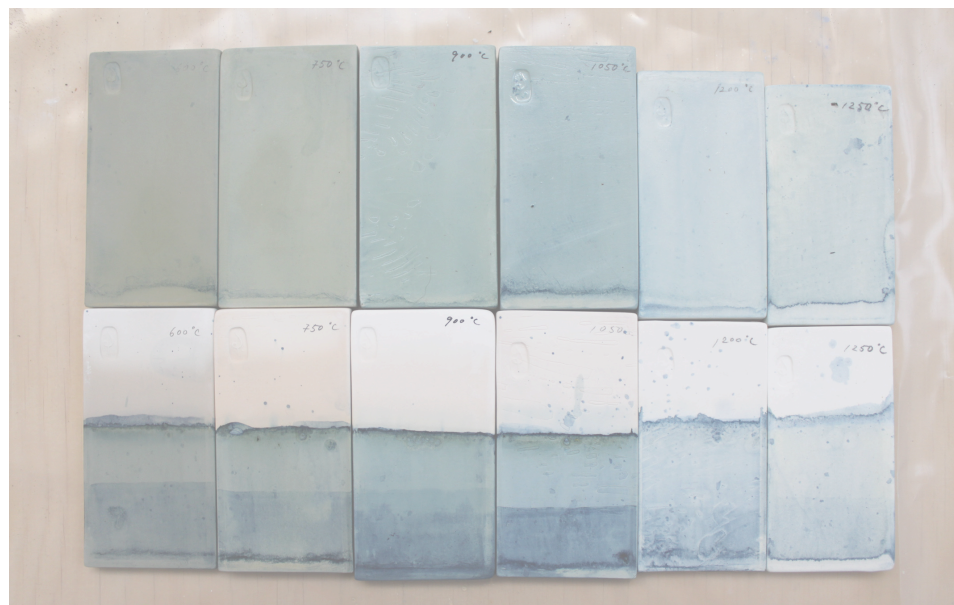
3. Dyeing

- pH should read 9-10.
- For the first dipping, dip for 5 to 10 minutes.
- When taking the fabric, wait until the colour changes to blue.
- Between dippings, wait for 10 to 30 minutes.
- From the second dip, wait 1 minute for the each dipping.
- (Indigo starts to peel off if dipped for too long)

Photos on the right are taken at Aino Favén's studio.



1. Indigo balls  
2. Grinding indigo  
3. Concentrated vat  
4. Waiting at 50°c  
5. After 1 hour  
6. Diluted with water  
7. Before oxidation  
8. After oxidation  
9. Testing with tiles



Day 1. Tiles tested at Aino Favén's studio



Day 6. After being exposed to sunlight for 6 days, colours started fading.  
(the left side was covered with a tape to avoid sunlight.)

## 5. Colour testing (continued)

After the experiment with Favén, I was still curious to create the indigo vat from scratch using only natural ingredients. I researched traditional methods then spent about two months experimenting only with natural indigo (p.74.75). However, all trials failed miserably. It involved collecting wood ash, soaking it with water for several days to extract high level of alkali water, making calcium from combusting sea shells, and feeding the vat with brown sugar and wheat bran, mixing it everyday for two weeks (Miller 1984, Sandberg 1989, Yoshioka 2011). Japanese indigo was ordered from *Aikuma* in Tokyo, Japan.

Eventually I went back to Favén's recipe, adjusting slightly and playing with adding salt and sugar to the vat. Surprisingly, the vat with sugar created a more even surface, whereas with salt, the surface pattern became more abstract and dramatic. The tiles for dying were fired at 600°C and 900°C due to their colours being grey and white.

The colour was fading much faster than I expected as in the image on the left (Day 6). I also tested using UV light, but natural sunlight was working more effectively.





Backside of a tile, not exposed to sunlight.



Front side of a tile, exposed to sunlight for about three months.



Sachio Yoshioka's recipe with Japanese natural indigo

(Translated from Yoshioka, 2011, p.72,73)

ash (preferably oak)	700g
Japanese natural indigo ( <i>Sukumo</i> )	1kg
wheat bran	100g
calcined lime	20g
pH paper	some

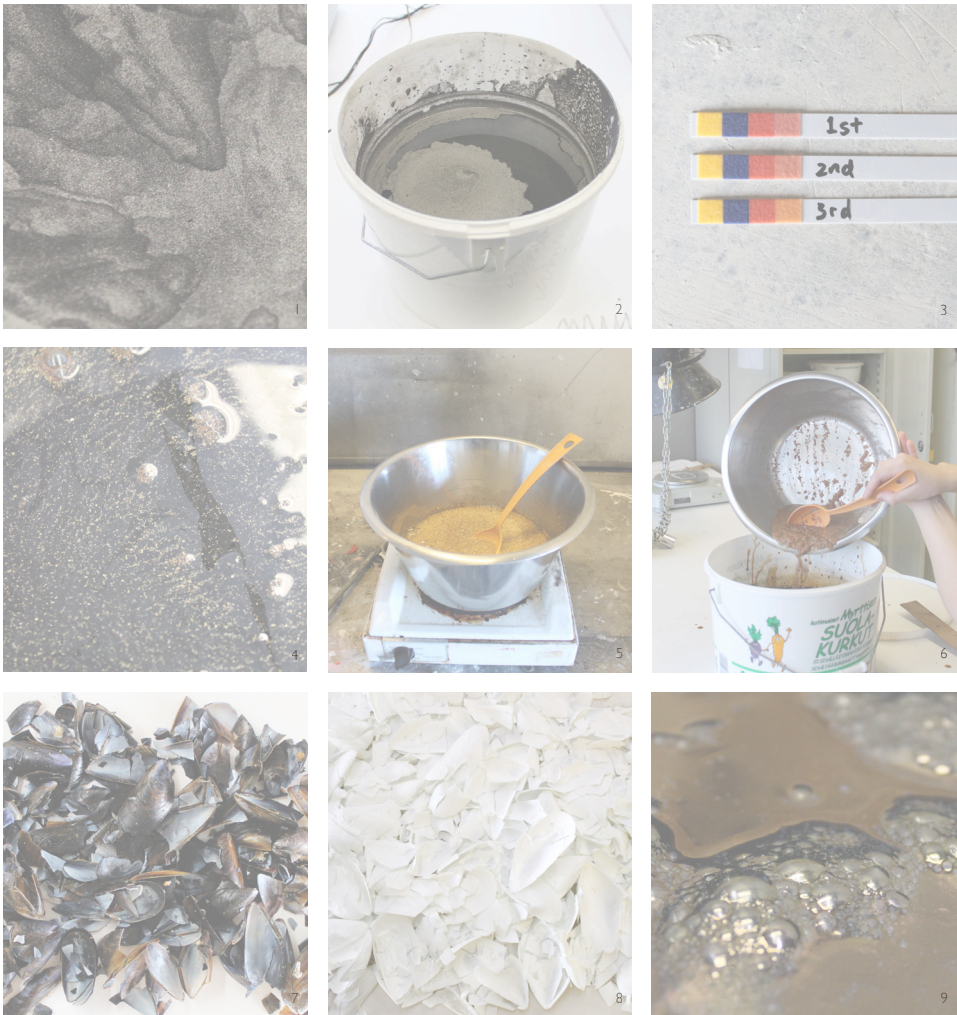
1. Making of ash water

- Put ash into a bowl, pour hot water (7 litres) and wait for 2 days.
- Sieve the water into another bowl.
- Add hot water again to the remaining ash, wait for 2 days.
- Sieve the water to take the second ash water. Repeat to take the third one.

2. Making of an indigo vat

- Add indigo into a 20-litre bucket.
- Add the second ash water (5 litres) into the bucket.
- On the second day, add the third ash water and leave for 10 days.
- While waiting, stir well once a day.
- Keep the temperature around 20°C at all times.
- After 7-10 days, thin transparent film-like surface should appear.
- If not, keep waiting and stirring everyday.
- Boil wheat bran with water (2 litres) for 20-30 minutes.
- When cooled, add the bran into the indigo vat.
- Stir the indigo vat slowly once a day.
- About two days after, bubbles start forming on the surface gradually.
- Once this happens, alkalinity goes down, therefore add the first ash water or calcined lime to adjust the alkalinity to pH11-12.
- Stir slowly everyday to keep the vat alive.

Photos on the right are from my experiments, although I could not succeed in making the vat. It is probably due to the water and temperature that were not suitable for making the vat.



- 1. Wood ash (not oak)
- 2. Ash water
- 3. pH for first to third ash water (pH.12-11)
- 4. A film-like surface
- 5. Boiling wheat bran with water
- 6. Adding wheat bran
- 7. Sea shells
- 8. Calcined sea shells (lime)
- 9. Surface of indigo vat, ready to use

Ai Ono's recipe with Japanese natural indigo for ceramics  
(Adjusted from Aino Favén's recipe to suit for ceramics)

1. Making of a stock solution (concentrated vat)

water 50°c	500ml
Japanese natural indigo ( <i>Sukumoto</i> )	100g
sodium hydroxide NaOH (38 Bé)	38ml
sodium dithionite	30g

- Soak indigo in water over night.
- Keep the temperature around 30°c while soaking.  
(I have used the plaster drier)
- Next day, add sodium hydroxide and sodium dithionite.
- Wait for 1 hour. While waiting, keep the temperature at 50°c.
- After 1 hour, a flower-like pattern should be floating on the vat.

2. Adding water to the stock solution

water 20-24°c	5 litre
salt or sugar (syrup)	100g

- Add the stock solution to the 5 litres of warm water.

3. Dyeing

- pH should read 9-10.
- Keep the vat around 30°c
- Dip for about 5 seconds. Indigo oxidises very quickly with ceramics.
- Wait until the surface dries.
- Do more dippings if necessary.
- Applying too many layers is not recommendable as the indigo starts to come off.



Top: Indigo oxidising on ceramics  
Middle: Dying ceramics  
Bottom: Salt or sugar.  
The bluer top half has been dyed with sugar and the rest with salt. More smoother surface was obtained with sugar.





## 5. Colour testing (continued)

As the colours from my inner visual experiences were not only indigo, testing with several other textile dyes as well as indigo hair dye was also conducted. Those included Cochineal (purple), logwood (dark purple/black), madder (red), safflower (red/yellow), pampas grass (yellow) and hibiscus (brown/grey). As opposed to indigo, those plants, except for safflower, needed boiling to extract the colour. Recipes that I adjusted from Yoshioka's and Minowa's are included in pages 80-82. Alum was used as a fixer for those colours in textiles (Yoshioka 2011, Minowa 2010), therefore I experimented with applying it for ceramics as well. The colours with alum changed slightly to brighter colours but my preference was towards the colours without alum. Yet after a few days from the dying experiment, they started to reveal an interesting reaction. The tiles which were dipped with alum started to grow crystal-like structures and it kept growing. This was a totally unexpected result and the abstract patterns were similar to my imagination from the music. After testing with several colours, I chose pampas grass, logwood and indigo for final exhibition pieces. Some were used with alum.

Left: Dyer's hand





### Cochineal (purple)

water 1 litre  
cochineal 5g

Crash the cochineal into small pieces.  
Boil for over 30 minutes.  
Dye while the water is still hot.

Add alum (5g/liter) if needed.



### Logwood (dark purple, black)

water 1 litre  
logwood 10g

Boil for over 30 minutes.  
Dye while the water is still hot.

Add alum (5g/liter) if needed.



### Madder (red)

water 1 litre  
madder 10g

Crash the madder into small pieces.  
Boil for over 30 minutes.  
Dye while the water is still hot.  
Add alum (5g/liter) if needed.



### Pampas Grass (yellow)

water 1 litre  
pampas grass 8g

Boil for over 30 minutes.  
Dye while the water is still hot.  
Add alum (5g/liter) if needed.



### Hibiscus (brown, grey)

water 1 litre  
hibiscus 10g

Boil for over 30 minutes.  
Dye while the water is still hot.  
Add alum (5g/liter) if needed.  
Alternatively use ash water to create  
greenish grey colour (image left).



### Indigo hair dye (green, blue)

Add warm water little by little to the  
powder until it becomes like a paste.

Apply directly to tiles.  
Wait until it dries.  
Wash the paste.



## Safflower (red, yellow)

water 3 litre  
safflower 100g  
ash water 5 liter  
vinegar 5ml



Put the cold water into a bowl.  
Put the safflower in a fabric.  
Squeeze the safflower in water to extract yellow pigment.

After extracting all the yellow pigment,  
put warm ash water into a bowl and  
mix with the remaining safflower.

Take the safflower out from the liquid.  
Add the vinegar to the liquid.  
Gradually the colour changes to red/  
orange colour.

Leave the things for dyeing for about  
0.5-1 hour in the liquid.



Top: Cochineal 'C' (left) / logwood 'L' (right)

Bottom: Top half, hibiscus 'H' / pampas grass 'K' / safflower 'B' / indigo (failed) 'I'

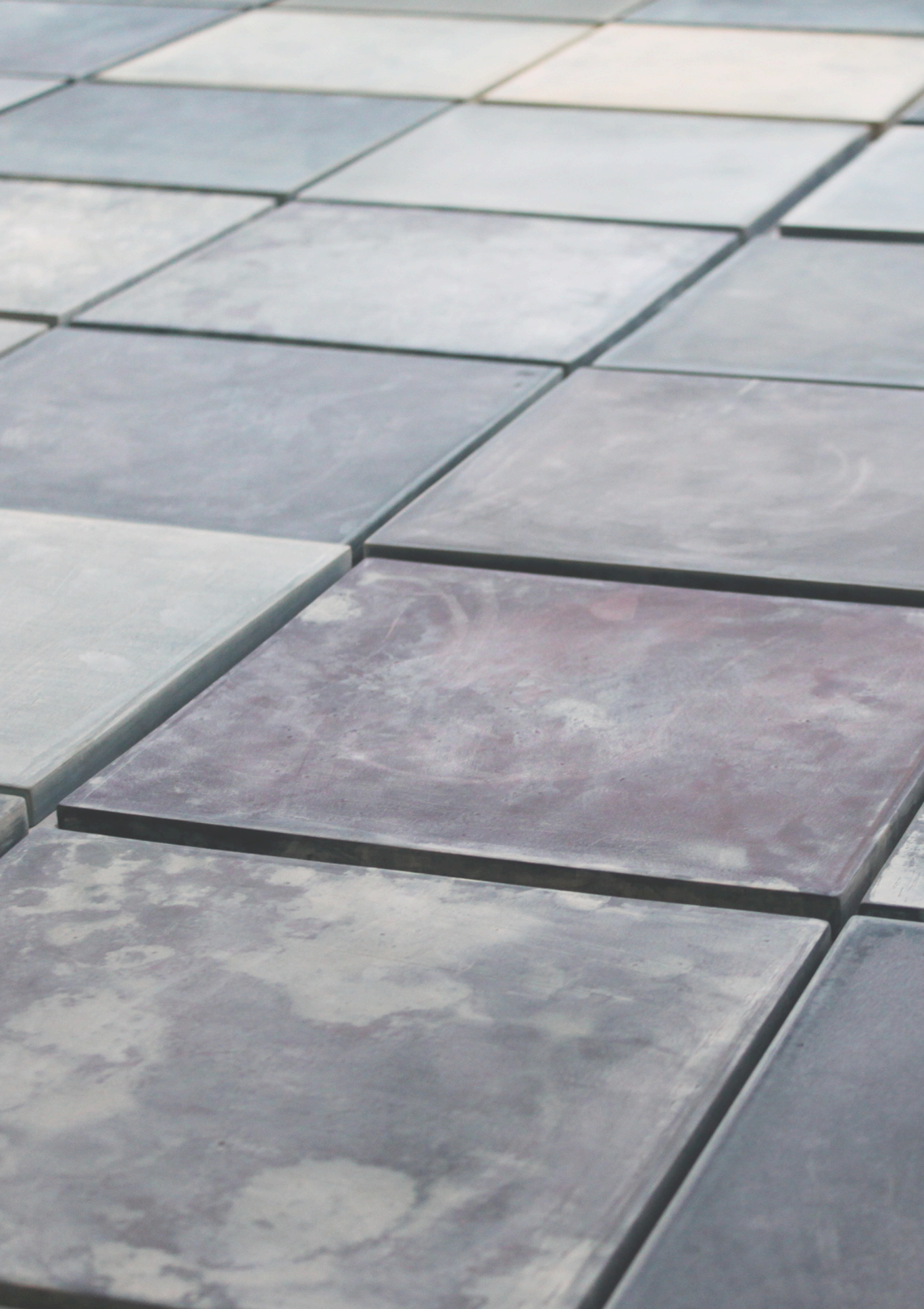




Above: Madder  
 Right: Colour samples with alum







## 6. Exhibition

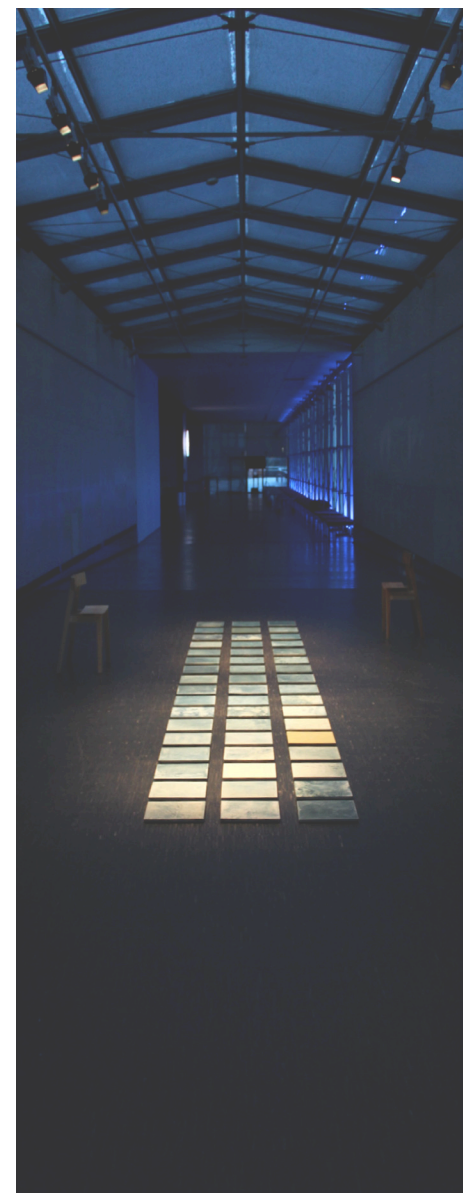
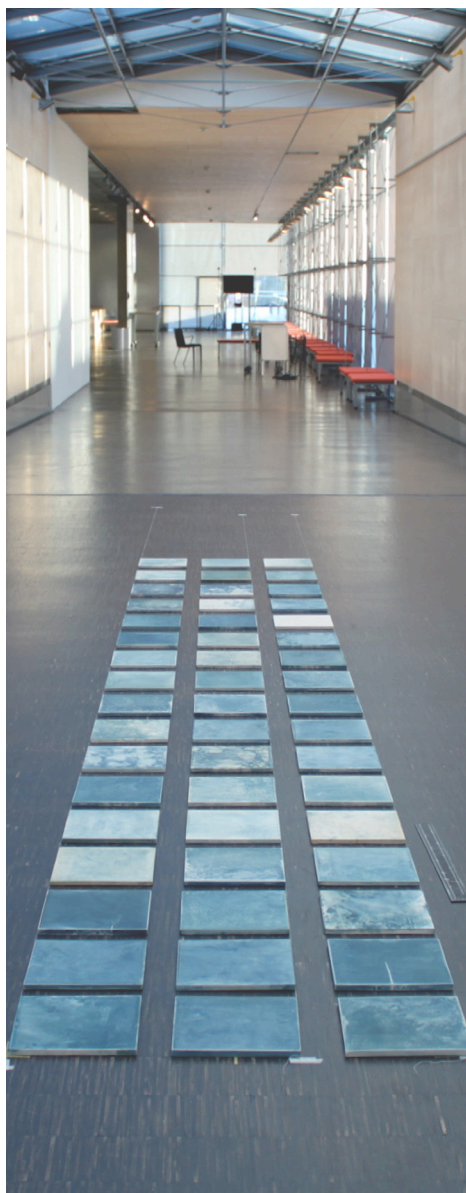
The shape for the final pieces was influenced by Ad Reinhardt; *Squares, not large, not small, sizeless* (Reinhardt 1991, p.82). Having worked with large scale ceramics previously, it did not strive me to create a large scale art work again for this thesis. Instead, I took the measurement of the square from the size of a normal kiln so that it fitted comfortably on a kiln shelf, making it not too large and not too small in a scale of ceramics. It also enabled me to create many pieces simultaneously. I decided on placing the squares on the floor, like a stage (Fig.17) Although I have tested with making a frame and gluing to a board to mount on a wall, it did not succeed as the low fired ceramics were too fragile. The decision on the form had to be made at the early stage of the production, due to the time-consuming process. In the end, I created over sixty tiles for the exhibition at Lume Galleria at Aalto ARTS, between 21st to 25th January 2012.

After colouring all the squares, I placed them on a floor to see the composition. I realised that the height was too short and therefore I felt that it needed something to lift up the dimension. Music seemed for me the most appropriate means for creating a different atmosphere, like the method Yves Klein used with his paintings. In addition, lighting was planned with a help of Samppa Murtomäki, to evoke the sense of being in the deep ocean (Fig.21).

I sought for collaborators for improvisation and contacted Sibelius Academy, Metropolia and other musical acquaintances. Unexpectedly it was a tough quest to find musicians as not many were willing to perform without a composed music. Eventually the cellists, Anni Kallioniemi and Hannu Pekka Heikkilä, who have been my cello teachers at Metropolia Music Conservatory, kindly volunteered to perform at the exhibition together with myself. Chairs used at the exhibition were kindly on loan from a furniture designer, Woojin Chung.

Left / Fig.17 : Colouring with indigo





Left / Fig. 18: Putting the tiles onto the floor

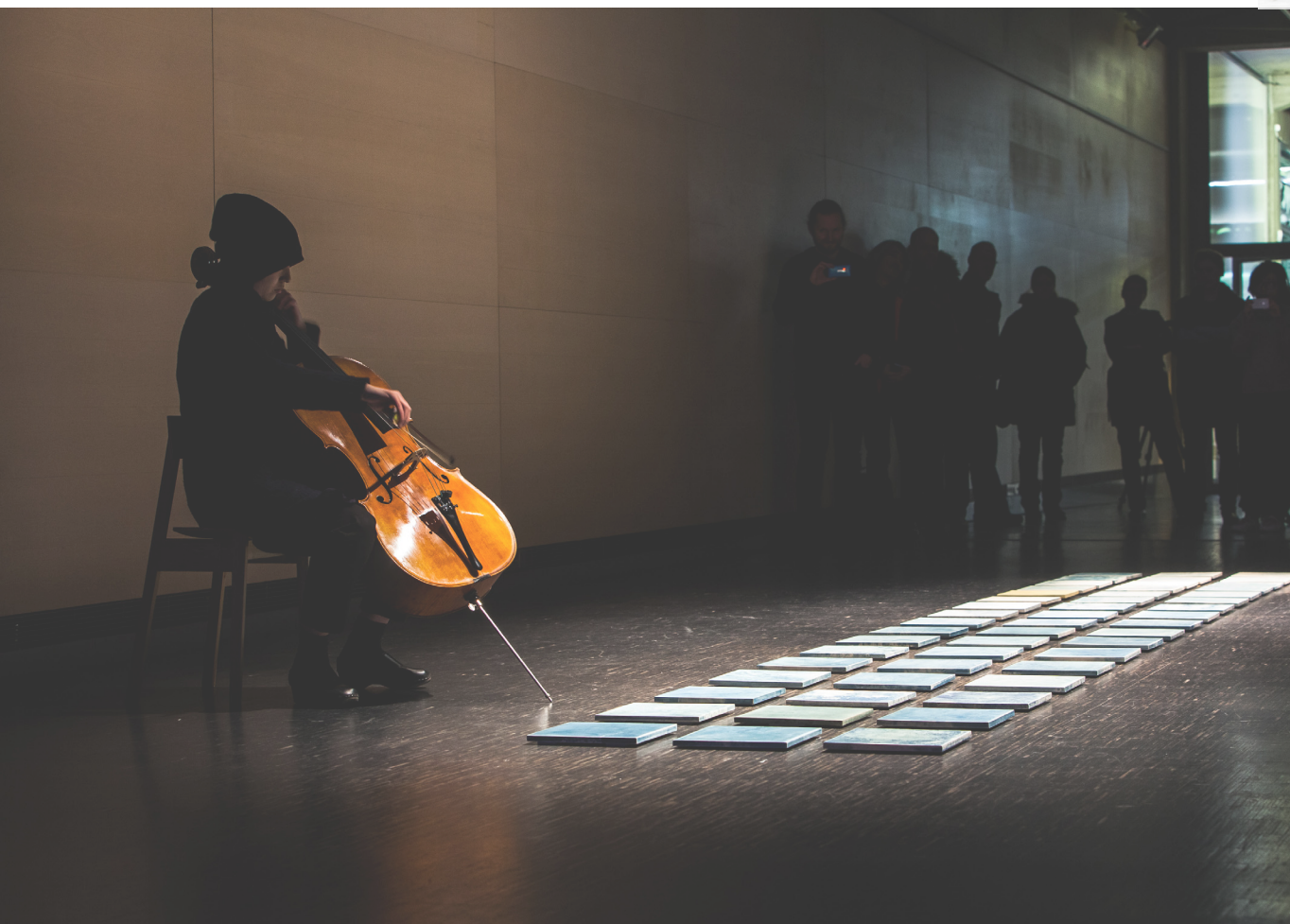
Right / Fig. 19: Putting small tiles under the square tiles to lift them up, to create shadow

Left / Fig. 20: Close up

Right / Fig. 21: Night time with blue light



When performing, there were no rehearsals and we did not plan anything beforehand. I told Kallioniemi and Heikkilä my inspirations for the art work, then we simply started making sound based on the art work. While subjective background knowledge was reflected in my creation of sound, the others were alien to it, thus it was interesting for me to listen how they communicated with the art work and the sound. Improvisation is truly a challenging task. It is highly dependent on each performer's knowledge, technique, emotion, communication and concentration. It is also an amalgamation of chance and serendipitous moments (Mäkelä & O'Riley 2012, p.10) that influences instant and spontaneous creation of sound.



Improvisation was performed twice, first with Kallioniemi on Monday 21st for the opening and with Heikkilä on Friday 25th for the closing. Both started at five o'clock which is chosen specifically to show the lighting effectively. It was the time of dusk, therefore as the improvisation continued, we were surrounded by the night sky and only lights were the spotlight and blue lights. The exhibition turned out to be a concert. We lost the sense of time and were performing over one hour each time. The emotional and meditative quality of the sound seemed to surpass the art work, yet it did not trouble me. I enjoyed performing, sensing every movement and subtle sound of the cello.

Left / Fig. 22: Opening. Photography by Jan Ahlstedt  
Above / Fig. 23: Opening with Anni Kallioniemi. Photography by Jan Ahlstedt





## 7. Comments and evaluations

From the exhibition, it was obvious that I took some decision making too quickly especially for the shape and size. Probably also due to the large exhibition space, those square tiles, that fitted comfortably in a kiln, seemed too small and some regarded them just as floor tiles, and not so much as an art work. Also I could have experimented more with height and angle when placing the work.

Transient character of the colour was not easily recognisable at the exhibition, because the transformation was a slow process. Only few people who visited the exhibition regularly noticed the subtle change of colours, which I am very grateful. Recordings by video or slideshows depicting the changing of colours could have been provided for the viewer to better understand the process. Also the arrangement of tiles could have been in different order.

At the opening and closing when the music was performed, I did not explain anything about the work beforehand. Although there was a artist statement placed on a table nearby, not many could read it due to the dark setting of the exhibition. This resulted in making the viewer puzzled, yet some of them commented it was a pleasant feeling not knowing what was happening. I expected that the viewer would walk around when the music was performed, but none of them came closer to the the art work. The lighting and the spacing of cellists and the art work made it impossible for the viewer.

Overall, different paths I have explored for the exhibition have been inspiring as they provoked many possibilities for development. With the knowledge I have gained through this thesis, I would like to investigate further on how to narrate transience and ephemerality more effectively to the viewer.

Fig.24: Exhibition. Photography by Jan Ahlstedt



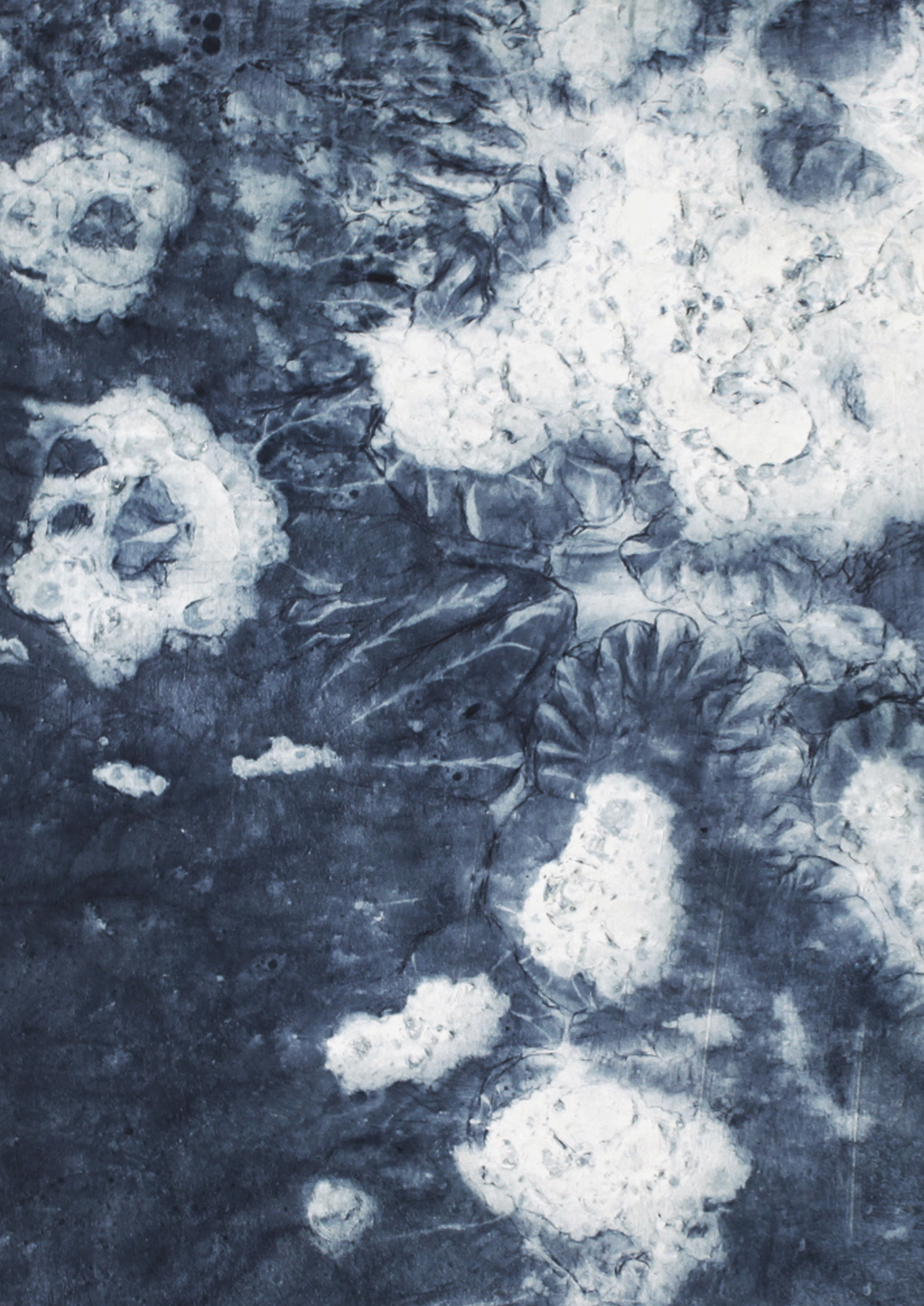
Details of colour











## *Conclusion*

Throughout the thesis development, chances have played a significant role. Inspirational moments that were attained through fruitful encounters helped to delineate my ideas and contributed in enhancing the outcome. Although the thesis question of expressing the inner visual landscapes derived from Pétteris Vask's music seemed simple and straightforward, it felt that I have sailed across quite a distance to reach to the terminus point. Along the process, the paths I chose to explore further seemed too many and too broad, and therefore I have struggled to narrow down my thoughts.

In terms of the outcome, I consider my work as a work in progress. I have only uncovered the tip of the iceberg where I have still a vast amount to discover. It has been a great opportunity discovering fields that I had never entered before such as practice-led research, visual music, and natural textile dyeing, and I would like to continue exploring them further. Also thinking afresh the abilities of clay enriched my perspective on creativity. After the exhibition many things for improvement were pointed out, such as the form, scale and spatial composition. During this thesis development, I have concentrated on creating the colours that associated with my subjective imagination, yet those that I have excluded during the process have also been inspirational. I am certain that the accumulation of knowledge from this experience will guide me to develop another sphere in the ceramic art.

So, as I write this, the snow has covered the streets and there are no leaves left on the trees anymore. The black branches and the icy white snow are creating pleasant contrast. The sign of spring has not arrived, yet the sun has gradually started to light the day longer than before. Four years have passed since I arrived in Helsinki. With this thought, I feel a little melancholy about concluding. I am content that I have found my way to Helsinki. For me, dark nights with glistening snow have been inspiring and comforting. I have gained countless new knowledge during my study and I am thankful to my tutors, teachers, friends and my family who have warmly supported me throughout.





## *Appendix*

### *Interlude continued - a deviation from a mundane life -*

With an insentient or rather, mystified mind, I was in South Korea. In search of inspirations for further development of my thesis work, I decided to go to South Korea to work as an apprentice for a South Korean ceramicist for two months in Spring 2012, and later to Japan to visit studios, museums and factories. The intention was to gain knowledge of completely different approaches to ceramics and other arts, and to learn diverse styles of living as an artist and maker. It was a fruitful and inspirational experience, and has led me into thinking afresh the abilities of clay as a versatile material. Also it contributed to deepen my understandings of cultural influence towards my artistic expression.

The ceramicist was Hyang-Jong Oh. He spent thirty years making only Onggi which are traditional large-scale storage jars used still commonly in South Korea for preserving food. I was fortunate to meet him at the biannual international ceramic festival in Aberystwyth in UK where he was demonstrating his slab-building technique of making large-scale Onggi. His skill was astonishing. He was able to make one Onggi that is more than two metres high in two days, with hand stretched slabs as equal to his height. It was the sound of his rhythmical wedging, slab-making and building method that caught my attention. He used his hands and sometimes differently shaped wooden tools for pounding the clay to make it stiffened. I was interested in how to recreate the identical sound, as mistakes were clearly recognisable just by listening to the sound of clay. So I tried, and ended up travelling all the way to South Korea to learn the technique at his studio which unexpectedly was in an abandoned elementary school in a remote country side called Hwasun.

Hyang-jong Oh was a man of routines. At 8 AM he would wake up and make breakfast. Everyday he would eat two thick slices of toast with non-added-sugar blueberry jam, one fried egg and a bowlful of fresh smoothie made with yogurt, half an apple, a banana, an orange and two tomatoes. After breakfast, he would work on his Onggi or tea bowls until lunch time. Everyday lunch prepared by his apprentices included rice, grilled mackerel, steamed broccoli and cabbage and some Kimchi (Korean spicy pickles). In between pots and bowls, he would practice on his Korean traditional flute called Teegun for a short while. After dinner he would work until 1 or 2 AM and then sleep on his handmade electrically heated clay bed. As I was working and living in what used to be an elementary school, and of course there was a gym with a Ping-Pong machine, Ping-Pong practice after lunch was added to my routine in order to gain more muscles for slab making. I also played a different Korean traditional flute called Danso as it helped building inner abdominal muscle, according to him.

Oh's passion for Onggi was overwhelming. Although some recent Onggi makers tend to use machines for making long slabs, he used only his hands and local materials to make what he called 'delicious ceramics'. When driving his car, he would always watch outside looking for clay, and if he found some, he would go there the next day with sacks and a shovel. His glazes were also organic, using local and non-toxic materials. He often picked some clay from the play ground in front of the school, and on the same day, it was tested in his small handmade gas kiln.

Above all the techniques, the most important aspect I learnt from Oh was the mentality of being an artist and a craftsman. Oh truly loved ceramics and devoted thirty years making Onggi. With the average of sixteen working hours daily, he produced many tablewares and Onggi which he sold almost daily to customers visiting his studio in a remote countryside. Those two months working for him were hard, yet it was a highly valuable experience for pursuing and considering my own career as an artist and maker.



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Fig. 5: <http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-50.php>, accessed on 26.1.2013.

Fig. 6: <http://www.dsource.in/course/colour-theory/colour-description/colour-description.html>, accessed on 26.1.2013.

Fig. 7: <http://minimalissimo.com/2012/10/black-paintings/>, accessed on 10.2.2013.

Fig. 8: <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/klein-ikb-79-t01513>, accessed on 30.1.2013.

Fig. 22: Photography by Jan Ahlstedt

Fig. 23: Photography by Jan Ahlstedt

Fig. 24: Photography by Jan Ahlstedt