IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH CREATIVITY

- EXPLORING AND EXPRESSING IDENTITY THROUGH CREATIVE WORK

Master’s Thesis

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Abstract
Being on the brink of graduation, I wanted to take time to truly explore my identity and ways of expressing it through creative work to make my future wishes and possible paths clear. I have studied in the department of design and my interests within this field have always been in the more artistic ways of working. I am progressively gearing towards a fine art with which, it is why I have faced questions about identity and a need to understand how and what I want to express and what would be my way in creativity.

Through my research question: “Can engaging in creative work result in a stronger sense of identity and in ways of expressing it?” I aimed to understand various aspects of identity and the possible constructive impact of creative work on gaining a stronger sense of self. So I analyzed if one can develop a better understanding of one’s identity through the creative process and thus construct ways of expressing their identity more efficiently. This is examined through literature, practice-led research, and reflecting on my identity & analyzing the creative processes of three artworks created as a part of this thesis. These creative processes include exploring different materials and possible paths from sculpture and painting to sculptural but functional objects. Additionally, I reflect on my relation to the terms designer & artist and examine the interface & fusions of design and art to find my way of creating.

In this thesis I suggest that the act of creation is a way to discover and express aspects of the self and that identities get constructed and strengthened when one is engaged in creative practices. I propose that the benefits of self-reflection and consciously exploring one’s creative process includes aspects such as a stronger sense of identity, self-understanding, and gaining trust & confidence in one’s abilities. For someone who struggles with identity questions connected to creativity, this thesis can be beneficial as it shows how taking time to reflect on yourself and experimenting with creative work can lead to positive growth and works that better convey what is important to our identity.

Keywords
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- self-reflection
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INTRODUCTION

In order to understand how one might express themselves through creative work and how that can strengthen their sense of self, I offer an insight into a creative process that ponders on my past, present, and possible paths. This process has had an immensely positive impact on me as I explored ways to combine various interests, sides of my identity, and different ways of working through three artworks. These works express personal meaning, narrative, and desire to continue as an artist as they vary from enigmatic sculptural but functional objects to sculpture and lastly to seeing my way in painting.

The chapter "Identity" introduces different aspects of identity and for example how society and different environments can affect one’s sense of self as well as presenting the notion of one's own way. In the chapter "Creativity intertwined with identity", as creativity is at the center of this thesis, concepts of creative and artistic identities are introduced. Despite this, I am mainly using the broad term “identity” throughout this thesis as I believe that engaging with creative work does not only impact the creative side of identities, but can also be used as a tool for overall understanding of one’s self and their narratives. In this chapter, I also focus on aspects of the creative process that might positively impact the development of a stronger sense of identity. It further introduces the connection between identity and creativity while touching topics such as uncertainty, questioning, reflection and confidence while delving into inspiration and the sense of identity. It further introduces the connection between the person and the object created.

The chapter "Questioning labels and exploring the interface of design and art" uncover my struggle with expectations tied to labels of designer & artist and burrows deeper into my research of the concept of fusing design and art together. “My narrative” briefly introduces my narrative and presents my past works and future wishes. In it I also introduce three artist inspirations that have helped me to expand my own ideas of what an artist can be and do. The chapter “My creative process” is naturally about my creative process which shows how I have expressed myself through the creative processes of three artworks. I start by showing an overall creative process of going deep into my identity and inspirations after which I introduce the making process of all three works separately and in more detail. After this, I analyze the final pieces and their processes, whether I feel that they express my identity or not and how the creative process affected the development of my sense of self and ways of working. The limitation of this study is the process of making and its products, whether these artworks differ from my previous work to see if this creative process has evolved the sense of self. As expressed by Mäkelä (2007), “the way artists and designers connect themselves to the field of research has been referred to as practice-led research” and the core of the practice-led design is the “relationship between the researcher who is simultaneously an artist/designer, whose artistic process and production of artefacts is the target of the reflection” (Mäkelä & Nímkulati, 2011: 1, 8). So the artefact, which can be for example a designed object, painting, or a dance performance has a fundamental position in the research process. (Mäkelä, 2007: 157) On top of this, different forms of documentation such as sketching, writing, or photography work as a way for reflection before, during, or after the creative practice. (Mäkelä & Nímkulati, 2011: 1.8) I took into my own process the aspect of reflecting on my-self and on the creative process and the results of it whilst I also incorporated other tools from this method, such as documentation, mostly in the form of photography.

Smith and Dean mention that “...creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs...” (Smith & Dean, 2009: 5) and agree that practice-led research is a suggestion that the practices of artists/designers can yield to research insights arising from the making itself, the documentation and the theorisation of the creative work. (Smith & Dean, 2009: 2) Similarly, according to Mäkelä, the artefact made by an artist-researcher can be used in answering research questions and offering argumentation on the topic at hand since it presents the notion of one’s own way as a method for collecting and understanding information. (Mäkelä, 2007: 158) “Thus, the process of making and its products are strongly connected with the source of knowledge. In this sense, we are facing the idea of knowing through making” (Mäkelä, 2007: 158) where various topics “...are explored and manifested through the production of creative artefacts. This implies that, as an object of experience, the creative product is as important as any knowledge embodied in it.” (Mäkelä, 2007: 159) While the object by itself does not have a voice of knowledge, it can be articulated through interpretation and analysing it in relation to the research questions. (Mäkelä, 2007: 158, 163) While I also use the knowledge acquired from the reviewed literature to reach my conclusions, I analyze my creative process and the artefacts as is typical for practice-led research. I ponder on whether I achieved my goal of finding ways of expressing my identity and reflect on whether these artworks differ from my previous work to see if this creative process has evolved the direction of my creative work. I also analyze how the creative processes were beneficial in perceiving & constructing my identity and finding ways to express it in order to examine the possible answer to my research question.

Throughout my creative process, I found moments that felt connected to gaining trust and understanding of my identity. Such moments were involved in using tools like mood boarding, sketching, painting, photography, creating collages, and prototyping. Also, because self-reflection is an important part of practice-led research, I used writing & reflecting on what inspired me as tools. During this process, I have also used envisioning as a method or a tool to better understand my possible paths and goals. I have come to believe that envisioning is a meaningful part of the creative process and the process of understanding identity as one can imagine possible future scenarios and the desired path for themselves and their creative work.

Additionally, one last method or a concept which helped me in making my own path clearer was the Japanese concept of ikigai which offers tools for deep self-reflection about one’s passions and purpose. This is done through considering what one loves it is good at and how those can be implemented into something that one can also get paid for and possibly answer a need in the world. (japanahome.com) I benefited from all of these explained methods and tools in perceiving and better understanding my identity, my passions, and what I could do with them. This is why I believe that it can be helpful for anyone wanting to construct the self and finding one's path to engage with said methods.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this thesis to achieve general knowledge and a stronger understanding of my identity is practice-led research but I approach my question from two perspectives. By reviewing various literature to form a base knowledge of concepts such as identity, creativity, and the interface of design and art and by engaging in creative work & analysing the results of it. This has allowed me to study the topic deeply and in a diverse way. Through the creative process and the artworks that I created, I gained analyzable information and conclusions about the connection between the creative process and a stronger sense of identity.

As expressed by Mäkelä (2007), “the way artists and designers connect themselves to the field of research has been referred to as practice-led research” and the core of the practice-led design is the “relationship between the researcher who is simultaneously an artist/designer, whose artistic process and production of artefacts is the target of the reflection”. (Mäkelä & Nímkulati, 2011: 1, 8) So the artefact, which can be for example a designed object, painting, or a dance performance has a fundamental position in the research process. (Mäkelä, 2007: 157) On top of this, different forms of documentation such as sketching, writing, or photography work as a way for reflection before, during, or after the creative practice. (Mäkelä & Nímkulati, 2011: 1.8) I took into my own process the aspect of reflecting on myself & on the creative process and the results of it whilst I also incorporated other tools from this method, such as documentation, mostly in the form of photography.

"We are many, many things. Our identity consists of all the different facets of our lives. Creativity is finding ways in which they intersect and then creating something meaningful out of it.” (Mijares, 2019)
IDENTITY

1.1 WHAT IS IDENTITY?

I aimed to better understand what identities are, how they are constructed, and what influences them as this is helpful in understanding how to express them and what could be the impact of creative processes on its development. I want to start by saying that the core nature of identities is that they are fluid, meaning that your identity is always in construction, throughout your life which means that identities can change and evolve. These changes can occur for example because of age, situations, and meaningful life events. According to Stets and Serpe, “it is assumed that identity change is ongoing but very gradual. Individuals may not find their identity as different from yesterday, last week, or last month. It is only when considering a longer period of time ranging from months to years that they may see a difference.” (Stets, Serpe, 2013: 47) So while the core of identities may be stable, the ambiguous nature makes them be in constant flux, (Gioia, et al. 2000) and the self is a continuous formulation and preservation of the self. (Weick, et al. 2005) In addition, the words “identity” & “self” often intertwine and the concept of self is important in understanding identities as the different sides of it within a person are arranged hierarchically and this combination of those sides create a self-structure of the “self”, meaning one’s understanding of themselves. (Stets & Serpe, 2013: 56)

Stets and Serpe argue that “identity is a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure (role identities), groups they identify with and belong to (group identities), and unique ways in which they see themselves (person identities). Meanings are individuals’ responses when they reflect upon themselves in a role, social, or person identity.” (Stets & Serpe, 2013: 34) They give examples of these three identities, such as a parent, teacher or student as the role identity, group identities such as being a part of a family, book or a sports club and lastly personal identities that are defining, internalized characteristics such as being creative or athletic. (Stets, Serpe, 2013: 31, 38) While these identities are commonly overlapping, Stets and Serpe mention that using these three bases to organize identities is helpful in comprehending one’s ties to social structures while the individual is also seeking to “…establish their distinctiveness as human beings.” (Stets & Serpe, 2013: 38) Identities are often also divided into for example professional, personal, artistic, or creative identities or sides of the self.

“Identity is the ultimate act of creativity - it is what we make of ourselves.” (Jusselion, 1996)

An interesting point to remember from Glaveanu and Tanggaard is that “…to begin with, identity doesn’t ‘exist’ only when the person is conscious of it, talks about it to others or acts driven by it. Equally, identity doesn’t ‘disappear’ when the self is unaware of expressing it through actions and interactions; identity is constantly performed, and (re)formulated within a performance, in the way people react to others, interpret situations, approach them, etc.” (Burke & Reitzes, 1981: 91) Although I do believe it to be valuable to also take time and stop to reflect on identity questions & how and why you do what you do. It is beneficial to learn about yourself, understand your identity, and feel a strong connection to the self to help with truly expressing it through creative work. How and what elements of your identity and creativity you express can naturally change and shift but it is all part of the journey of identity development.

Focused on design students, Kosonen describes that even though we “define and redefine ourselves in our internal dialogues” (Kosonen, 2018: 2) in everyday life, and in some ways, we are always working with our identities, uncertainty of graduation and the thoughts of the life after it might spark more reflection and questions about identity. (Kosonen, 2018: 2) “This identity work emerges both on the personal and the professional level as both influence the developing design identity.” (Kosonen, 2018: 2) Furthermore, Kosonen continues that “…professional orientations may conflict with personal interests and cause an identity crisis in creative fields in which professional and personal identities are typically intertwined.” (Kosonen, 2018: abstract) This was certainly one of the reasons for me to focus on my identity and creative work in this specific time of my life. It is natural to feel a sense of fear and excitement when going towards graduation and the uncertainty of life outside of one’s school environment. I believed that it would be extremely beneficial to use this time for personal exploration and identity questions to make my dreams and goals clearer. One aspect of why these questions of identity emerge close to graduation might be the fear of going out of your comfort zone, in this case, the university environment, while still questioning if you are ready and whether you have learned enough. During one’s school years, thinking about themselves and techniques & materials, one often has not yet fully developed their own identity in creativity but instead, first learning what is possible and how. It is through experience, learning the techniques, and constructing an identity that you start to go further and deeper into developing your own way and vision of creating.

1.2 MULTIPLE SELVES

Identities consist of multiple sides of the self and these different sides of identity can overlap and intertwine which McAdams titles as the “one-in-many-selves paradox.” (McAdams, 2001: 106) It relates to what I faced when thinking of how to combine and express different sides of my identity. According to McAdams, constructing different images of yourself allows you to integrate different personifications into one identity. (McAdams, 2001: 106) Piazza mentions similar ideas of “possibilities for identity” or “possible selves” that involve past and present selves and reflections of different perspectives to realize potential future selves. (Piazza, 2017: 34) There can be a hierarchy between these as some are more present depending on the situation. Stets and Serpe mention this hierarchy to consist of those three sides of identity that I mentioned earlier; role, group, and person identities. (Stets & Serpe, 2013: 43) These possible selves are intricate and variable but “…authentic in the sense that they represent the individual’s persistent hopes and fears and indicate what could be realized given appropriate social conditions”. (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 965) In this, there is the emphasis on the impact of societal aspects and Piazza writes that we envision these possible selves “…based on the social, cultural and historical contexts of our environment” (Markus & Nurius, 1986: 965).

It has been beneficial throughout my process to consider and ponder upon these possible selves. It has helped me to consider different sides of myself, the set of values and skills that I have, and how I would like my future self to use them. In the beginning, examining all of these possible selves confused me and I believed that it would be very difficult to somehow combine them in my creative work. I have later understood different ways to do so and also that it is absolutely normal to have various sides in yourself, sometimes even opposite to each other. Besides, I do not consider identities to be absolute or singular but instead, they are diverse, complicated, and explorative and these different selves enrich and allow for exploration within identities.
1.3 One’s Own Way

An alternative concept linked to identity is what Kosonen calls “one's own way”; both being fluid and evolving (Kosonen, 2018: 248). Kosonen mentions that the term "professional identity" is “…loaded with different interpretations, whereas ‘own way’ is more ambiguous and represents the ambiguity of finding one’s own way better” (Kosonen, 2018: 249). In fact, according to Kosonen, participants of their study spoke with words like “own way” and “own thing” rather than using the term professional identity. (Kosonen, 2018: 248)

I agree with Kosonen who says that developing one’s own way requires reflection on your goals and interests (Kosonen, 2018: 4) and this own way is something what I am aiming to construct for myself as well. Sometimes these processes can be partly unconscious but I have noticed the usefulness of pondering on questions regarding the hopes for the future, and for example what kind of creative do you imagine and hope yourself to be in that future? Or what would you have accomplished? These kinds of questions help in understanding more about one's identity and ways, what is the state of them now and how one wishes to develop them to get towards their goals. Furthermore, Kosonen describes finding one’s own way to be a three folded matter. Firstly, recognizing which activities and approaches or methods feel the most fitting to you. Secondly, being aware of the current way or path you have taken and reflecting on whether it is already in line with the desired way. Thirdly, taking actions towards the desired way and approach, matching them to your goals. “This last requires the desire for change.” (Kosonen, 2018: 248)

As reported by Kosonen, becoming aware of the chosen and the desired way is the main point of finding one’s own way. “If there is a big difference between these two, recognizing this may bring awareness of the factors that cause this.” (Kosonen, 2018: 249) Kosonen gives an example of one of their participant's stories, writing that “...Lauretta’s own way could have been to become an artist since this is what she seemed to desire most. However, her way had not thus far been the way of an artist, since she had made different choices.” (Kosonen, 2018: 248) I am also seeking to make more conscious choices towards my dreams and becoming aware of what I enjoy since I agree this be a way of creating your own way and further developing your identity.

I would like to end with a quote from Kosonen as it well describes the process of one’s own way and I believe that exploring this can have an immensely positive impact on the growth of one’s identity: “One way to look at the idea of one’s way is to imagine what it would be ideally. In an ideal scenario, one’s own way is something that makes your eyes shine and makes you want to fully engage with what you do. It inspires and brings satisfaction, both to the person and to others that are affected by her. It provides so much pleasure that one is willing to overcome obstacles and challenges in that area. It is something one loves or feels to be important, brings out the best in the person and makes her feel that she is where she always wanted to be. This commitment and inspiration also becomes visible for others, who may then begin to define this person and her work with specific terms that define her way.” (Kosonen, 2018: 249)

1.4 Narrative Identity

“...identity is understood as taking the form of a narrative, being in constant movement, having both more consistent, stable phases and phases of change.” (McAdams, 1993)

The symbiotic relation between identity and narrative (Holler & Klepper, 2013: 2) and the idea that identity is constructed through narratives is commonly accepted (Watson, 2012: 1) Furthermore, in the words of McAdams, narrative identity is “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of (...) life. The story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going.” (McAdams, 2011) So in a nutshell, narrative identity is the story of self which includes the past, present, and desired future. (McAdams, 2011)

According to McAdams, self-narratives consist of experiences and concerns that are temporally and thematically organized, creating one's identity. (McAdams, 2001: 110) Because we can choose to include and leave experiences and memories from it, identity is "to a certain degree, a product of choice". (McAdams, 2001: 110) We choose the events considered “most important for defining who we are and providing our lives with some semblance of unity and purpose.” (McAdams, 2001: 110) This brings the aim of building a personal narrative to be, according to McAdams, bringing together different parts of life into a coherent whole. (McAdams, 1993)

I will later discuss the impact of society on identities but as Kosonen writes: identity and narrative are simultaneously overlapping concepts with reflections of yourself in contrast to the environment, (Kosonen, 2018: 31) and “...they are formed in social interaction, they position our selves and grow from the culture(s) that they have been exposed to, and they are dynamic and change over time.” (Kosonen, 2018: 31) Kosonen adds that despite aiming to create a unique, personal narrative, the environment and sociocultural influence is always present and affects the story we build. (Kosonen, 2018: 32) As mentioned, both identity and narrative identity can evolve and change so it is possible to alter and further develop them. (Kosonen, 2018: 31) As stated by Kosonen, the key is the consciousness of these aspects in ourselves and understanding how they are constructed in relation to ourselves and the environment. Further, they both can be revisited and developed by discovering our current perception of our self-narrative, becoming more conscious of this construction and the powers that influence how we create it. (Kosonen, 2018: 31)

In a way, all of this becomes intertwined in the creative process. Your identity, narrative and its past & present, and your future dreams. All of these have an impact on the characteristics of your creative work, often even subconsciously. One’s past does not have to define their identity or work but even so, it has been interesting to understand how my interests, inspirations, and identity have continued to evolve but at the same time kept aspects from the past self. Pondering on narratives and one’s story is certainly a massive part of expressing the self through creative work as it forms the base for many of the aspects of life and creating.

1.5 Sociocultural Influence on Identity

I wanted to examine how creative work might benefit the construction of identities especially with someone who works in the field of arts but there are of course many other aspects that influence the development of those identities as well. I have briefly mentioned the influence of other people and environments but I would like to go a bit deeper into that topic. Kosonen sees identity as a “negotiation with the personal and the social dimension” (Kosonen, 2018: 27) because identities are socially constructed in reflection to the environment and to other people. (Tracey & Hutchinson, 2013: 29)

“How we perceive ourselves has a role in our creative endeavors” (Mijares, 2019), and how we perceive ourselves is affected by many things, for example, the society and the context & culture where we live and work in. So society and the environment play a role in affecting your identity and so forth also the work you create. (Mijares, 2019) These aspects can enrich our identities and work but it is interesting and important to reflect on them and to consider how much these external factors actually influence your internal self. Identity, even though built in relation to others, is still very personal and one’s own way of seeing themselves. By being conscious about it, it is possible to try to minimize the impact it has but the contexts of society and culture are inevitable (Culpepper, 2018: 94) because we see and hear affects our identities.

Going forwards from the vastness of a society, according to Culpepper, also individual people affect your ideal of the self because identities and social selves are constructed through those social relationships (Culpepper, 2018: 185) and "who you know can be said to at least partially determine the ideas you have, how you envision problems and solutions, and even, to a real degree, what you make". (Culpepper, 2018: 185)
According to William James, one has as many social selves as there are persons who recognize them. (William James 1892/1968) Piazza concludes that identities are influenced by sociocultural factors and "these factors are often internalized and incorporated into who individuals see themselves as." (Piazza, 2017: 7) According to them, as these circumstances are ever-evolving, so can identities be understood as being in the process of constant revision. (Piazza, 2017: 7)

These role and group or in other words "social" identities that I mentioned earlier usually involve expectations and even rules on how one should be which stem from societal norms. They can include for example labeling, myths, and how one should act and express one's identity. According to Stets and Serpe, group identities include being involved with others while trying to fulfill expected ways of behavior and expectations. (Stets & Serpe, 2013: 56) In agreement with Alan Thornton, rules and identifications given by others and through professions can affect a person's sense of self and identity. If individuals adopt titles or enter professions in which titles and roles are applied to them, then these identities are likely to affect each person's sense of self as a whole. (Thornton, 2013: 23) Although these norms, rules, and restrictions are most often just socially constructed ideas of what is the "right way" to be they can still have an overbearing effect that leads to frustration or feeling unworthy if the identity you have or want to construct does not fit into the ideas of norms or the given labels. In the words of McAdams: "of course, perfect unity and purpose in life is only an ideal and may itself not be fully desirable anyway." (McAdams, 2001: 102) I believe it to be beneficial for identity development to also distance yourself from the norms and ideals of the society about what your identity should be or look like and what you should create.

Eby also mentions that "The sense of inability may be based on some outside standard of what a "real" creative person is, or relates to being a "failure" at doing something creative. Getting beyond or "bypassing" intellectual restrictions on our creativity can be a matter of shifting one's attitudes and unrealistic standards. This idea of an outside authority for what we must be in order to create can be potentially self-limiting." (Eby)

In Kosonen's study, a participant called Oliver asks questions such as "Who am I as a designer and what designer do I want to become? What influences do I want to have in this world?" (Oliver in Kosonen, 2018: 1) Asking these specific questions can surely be helpful in realizing your goals but there is also a possibility that the ideas of norms and labels prevent you from finding your true self. When focusing too much on labels like a designer, the focus easily shifts into what you think that a designer should be or want to think about it rather than finding your way, outside of labeling yourself. Taking that time to truly be yourself, developing your identity, and doing what you want can be more difficult than what it sounds like but it is of course much more beneficial for the development of your true identity. Nevertheless, what I do relate to is Oliver's wish to "define what is important for him in life in general, and how he can integrate his personal interests with design work." (Oliver in Kosonen, 2018: 1)

In the case of artists, what comes to society's myths and the image of them is voiced by Piazza as including the idea as "solitary, tortured, and divinely gifted." (Piazza, 2017: 3) Assuming these myths can prevent one from reaching full potential or even block their mind from working altogether. (Piazza, 2017: 38, 43) The myth that an artist is gifted and talented at birth is particularly harmful and weighing this, Freeman writes that some "...individuals viewed their artistic capabilities as limited, and not a skill or ability that could be developed over time and with practice." (Freeman, 1993) On top of this, according to Freeman, the myth of being born with creative talent can make an artist feel like their creative process is undermined as "these beliefs essentially prevented them from realizing their creativity and their potential as artists." They continue: "on the other hand, individuals who did not allow the prevailing myths to guide their creative process or self-knowledge of what it means to be an artist were more productive and successful." (Piazza, 2017: 44)

"Artistic development occurs when a creative individual frees oneself from the negative myths of the artist, and when one practices one's artistic ability rather than believing that creativity is an inherent gift that cannot be developed over time." (Freeman, 1993)
2.1 CREATIVE AND ARTIST IDENTITIES

"In the end, there is creativity in identity construction just as there is identity construction in the most mundane forms of creative expression." (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014: 13)

Identity and creativity are connected in a way that they both are fluid, emergent & evolving (Piazza, 2017: 276) and as creativity is evolving, constructing it does not happen in one moment but it is developed cumulatively (Culpepper, 2018: 22) just as is the case with identity as well. Since being creative is the predominant side of myself I examined the concepts of creative and artist identities, ways of expressing them, and the impact of creative processes on identity development. To me, a predominant creative identity means that creativity is in the center of one's self, involving passion, joy, and a sense of purpose connected to creativity and arts. Nevertheless, it is not only connected within making art but within most of one's actions that require any type of creative thinking and how one expresses themselves for example through clothing. Similarly, according to Jausss, creative identity means that a person considers creativity to be a central part of their self. (Jausss & al., 2007: 91) Naturally, artist identity can also be seen to exist when one considers creativity as a central part of their self and in this manner, they can be recognized to overlap. But creative identity can of course be a part of identity even without an artist identity, meaning that one does not have to consider themselves an artist in order to think of creativity as central to their identity. Through the creative process, I believe these identities to also include ways of working and understanding what evokes inspiration and motivation in yourself.

"Simply put, there is not a moment when creative identity is born. It is an ongoing process, and for people who create, life is filled with such moments." (Culpepper, 2018: 251)

As identities are adaptable and contextual, depending on the situation different sides or roles (for example identities of an artist, a mom, or a teacher) are visible and can be overlapping. Glaveanu and Tanggaard claim that creative identities are also multiple instead of singular and how a person enacted their identity can differ among a variety of people and moments and it can transform because of these matters. (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014: 19) This is implied to be the case with artist identities as well.

Creativity or the role of the ‘creator identity’ (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014: 19) can be included in one of several roles. Glaveanu and Tanggaard add the following: “This can generate interesting situations in which a promoted creative identity in one context can be denied in another (a math teacher might be considered creative among colleagues but lose this status when talking to art teachers).” (Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014: 20)

"Creativity seems to be linked to our very identity; it is part of what makes us who we are felt as human beings and individuals." (Paul & Kaufman, 2014)

Creativity is engraved into humans, not only artists and not only in making art or developing intriguing solutions to problems but it can also be small everyday actions. (Culpepper, 2018: 24) Everyone can of course define creativity differently and the definition is for example linked to who they are and what type of creative work they themselves might be engaged in. (Piazza, 2017: 60) Piazza describes creativity in an interesting way saying that it means for example “...posing questions that open up bigger conversations... just being interested enough to continue asking questions, to try to investigate something further. Not necessarily coming to a resolution at the end of that investigation, but allowing your mind to, kind of, jump to places, to draw connections.” (Piazza, 2017: 224)

The following quote from Mijares illustrates what I believe creativity in the context of identity to be all about: “We are many, many things. Our identity consists of all the different facets of our lives. Creativity is finding ways in which they intersect and then creating something meaningful out of it.” (Mijares, 2019) Within creativity, it is possible to fuse different parts of ourselves into one realization, for example into a piece of art. Thus the creative process can become a reflective identity project with an emphasis on finding different aspects of the self & one’s narrative and expressing them through creative identities.

Distinguishing one's creative or artist identity is seen as of high importance when discussing becoming or being an artist and it is usually observed to include one's unique way of creating and the recognizable elements of their work that can differentiate them from other artist's identities and works. Asnani describes the importance of truly being yourself and of cultivating an artist identity saying that it is a way of giving to others what is uniquely you and to offer a way of experiencing life through you and your art. (Asnani, 2016) Furthermore, according to Martin, your creative or artist identity is something that is already in you, something that has to be extracted from within you by reflecting on identity through questioning who you are. Who are you in relation to others, to society, and who you are without any of this? Who are you if you cannot describe your job or for example the identity of a mother or a student? (Martin, 2019)
2.2 CREATIVE PROCESS

Throughout the process of this thesis, I carried interest in how immersion in creative work can be beneficial in cultivating and communicating one’s identity. As the creative process offers an opportunity for exploration, reflection, and expressing one’s self at that moment, it is a great tool for forming one’s identity. Creative identity is something that can of course be consciously worked with but it is still quite subconscious and something that develops and comes from the process of doing creative work. It is only through those countless projects that one can realize what they want to keep from them to the next one and what feels like their own way. It is over a longer period of time that one can become progressively comfortable with their identity and the ways of expressing it.

According to Piazza, the process of creativity is weaved together with the process of identity formation and so forth creative processes influence identities (Piazza, 2017) Identity is interconnected to creativity as both of them are fluid and emergent and the creative side of identity changes as the individual grows. (Piazza, 2017: 47) This connection is often quite naturally written by artists as they are seen to use creative processes and art, as marked by Gauntlett, “…to express or communicate something about their lives, feelings or experiences”. (Gauntlett, 2007: 2) I still do not believe that you necessarily have to be an artist to benefit from the advantages of creative work in identity construction. Karwowski and Kaufman write that in psychology, a humanistic perspective towards identity sees it as a creative process (Karwowski & Kaufman, 2017: xviii) and creativity is seen as representing a way to “self-understanding, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization” that leads to identity development. (Karwowski & Kaufman, 2017: xviii) This process of creation is a tool for experimentation and reflection and in fact, Culpepper describes creativity as a state of experience. (Culpepper, 2018: 58) They continue saying that this experience can be very experimental in nature, especially at the beginning of the process of developing one’s identity. In the end, this experience, the creativity, and its “fruits”, the end artefacts bring together different aspects of identity and the narrative of the maker.

Piazza mentions that for the most participants in their study exploring artist identities of art majors, “the creative process echoed the identity formation process” (Piazza, 2017: 276), meaning that identity construction and the creative process have a noticeable connection between them. The role and importance of creativity in identity development are fascinating as it is not only a way to express a unique self to others but is first and foremost a way to understand and define one who is to oneself. Creative work as a way of gaining trust and confidence in constructing artist identities and expressing them is emphasized by Piazza who mentions this link between creativity and forming an identity. (Piazza, 2017: 4) As an example, they give Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi who wrote that “…emerging artists relate to the world and discover who they are through the act of creation” continuing that “what artists discover through painting is most often some facet of self”. (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976) Piazza writes about artists at the beginning of their careers and how they see themselves, the role of an artist, and creativity. Many of them struggled with the courage to call themselves artists and go towards that path instead of something more conventional or what others expected from them. (Piazza, 2017: 122) But as mentioned, Piazza also notes that many of the participants closely linked and described the creative process in relation to working on their identity and developing these emerging artistic identities that were firmly associated with experimentation within creativity. (Piazza, 2017: 280) This study showed how their identities got constructed and strengthened dramatically during creative work. Most of them reported gaining courage and confidence in their creativity and capability to work in the field of arts. They learned to trust and cherish their experiences, skills, and creativity and gained confidence in knowing who they are as an artist & exploring and finding the tools to develop their own way.

A participant in Piazzas’s study described how through engaging with creative work they came to see themselves as one cohesive, creative person which shows that creative processes can play a big part in constructing a strong sense of self and a unified identity. (Piazza, 2017: 234) For another participant, the process of creation formed a way to “paint over the self that had been inscribed upon them” and this process was a way to discover their true self. (Piazza, 2017: 239) Piazza continues to write the following about this. “Through the act of creation participants in my study were in the process of “making themselves”. They were engaged in exploring who they were as artists from their own perspectives rather than relying on external models, or what they had been told about what an artist is or does. Deborah pointed out, “Creativity is what we do to show our true selves.” As she noted, the act of creation enabled her to “keep in these processes, and learning about yourself”. (Piazza, 2017: 282)

“...I think the reason why artists make art is because it’s the one activity that will teach you more about yourself than anything else you could do” (Piazza, 2017: 168)

2.2.1 QUESTIONING AND REFLECTION

A paragraph from David bayles & Ted Orland (1993): “Art is exquisitely responsive. Nowhere is feedback so absolute as in the making of art. The work we make, even if unnoticed and undesired by the world, vibrates in perfect harmony to everything we put into it — or withhold from it. In the outside world there may be no reaction to what we do, in our artwork there is nothing but reaction. The breathtakingly wonderful thing about this reaction is its truthfulness. Look at your work and it tells you how it is when you hold back or when you embrace. When you are lazy, your art is lazy; when you hold back, it holds back; when you hesitate, it stands there staring, hands in its pockets. But when you commit, it comes out like blazing.” (Bayles & Orland, 2001: 49)

From looking into the basics of art therapy, in search of answers to how art can affect or be used in identity-building I have understood that it is a way for very personal reflection and meaning-making. The basic principle of art therapy is that art can “provide a way to reach people in their deepest areas of identity: their creative drive and their desire”. (Moon, 2002: 7) The meaning-making process in art therapy is for example when the meaning of experiences is considered and how it can be manifested through creativity (Moon, 2002: 9) Through this, in the words of Moon: “Artistic vision becomes the means and the mechanism to find your ultimate personal truth - something barely articulated by most of us.” (Moon, 2002: 9) This is what I have personally been interested in, to find the means of articulating my ultimate personal truth through creative work.

“...by acting in and through art, your sense of identity changes.” (Rosd & Lang, 2013: 11)

Kniveton mentions that “one does not accurately know oneself if they are not reflective” (Kniveton, 2017: 11) but art can work as a tool for identity development based on its reflective nature and creative work withholding the ability to offer new points of views and a chance to contemplate and reflect. Culpepper mentions that studies by Gauntlett in 2007 suggest that the creative process and talking about what one had created resulted in participants building new perceptions of themselves and this of course is linked to identity development as one ponders on perceptions of the self. (Culpepper, 2018: 99)

Through creativity, it is possible to express every aspect of one’s identity, to question it and the aspects that might be influencing both, the identity and the creative work stemming from it. This questioning and reflection is valuable and closely tied to creating. Some questions that surely everyone engaged with creative work will face at some point are highlighted by Eby who writes the following: “Engaging in a creative venture often brings up questions and uncertainties related to personal identity: Am I qualified? Do I have enough experience, strength, talent, skill? Will the work be good enough? Will I be good enough?” They continue by writing that “creative expression is based on both our inner selves and our abilities, so maybe it is inevitable we question both our self concept and talents”. (Eby) The creative process is often a rollercoaster in which you might end up questioning everything about yourself and your work. As negative as it might sound, it is a way to face those questions and during creative endeavors, they can further help in constructing identities as you answer them, move on, and possibly get more trust in your vision and talent as you manage to continue the process despite these bumps in the road.
2.2.2 UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR

"...becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes your work distinctive." (Bayles & Orland, 2001: 3)

Moon writes that "the cultivation of an artist identity is a life-long pursuit" and it also involves a lot of uncertainty but while not-knowing might be an uncomfortable position, it can have positive impacts on our artistic encounters. (Moon, 2002: 66) According to Moon, when one is willing to face uncertainty and the lack of knowledge, the likelihood of being able to appreciate the process of learning and to be able to be open to exploration increases. (Moon, 2002: 66) I can definitely say that this is not always my strong point and I sometimes struggle with frustration in uncertainty but as Moon declares, it is true that "not knowing creates an open space into which new knowledge and new understanding can easily make its way". (Moon, 2002: 66) This resonates with my thesis process as well since in the beginning it felt like a vast unknown and while that was scary, it also made it interesting because of the curiosity of wanting to see where the process leads me. Moreover, it is true that this uncertainty can help to appreciate the process of learning and to be more open to anything while the process is ongoing.

Uncertainty, fear, and frustration are common parts of the creative process that can be overrun with trust and confidence but the risk for this creative frustration to get overpowering can result in settling for familiarity or in the worst case, giving up on the project. (Kosonen, 2018: 223) But as mentioned, results can be achieved by tolerating the uncertainty and getting over doubts. Especially with a personal project which you feel strongly connected to and feel the need to succeed, it is easy to have doubts and frustration in the case of stress or surprises in the process. Rasmus in Kosonen's study mentions how their project started going forward only when they did not look for hiding places anymore but trusted their self and intuition. (Kosonen, 2018: 223) Trusting the process of creating "...will eventually lead you over doubts, fears and other challenges that are natural parts of a creative process". (Kosonen, 2018: 225)

Kosonen illustrates a variety of responses to creative frustration from continuing to work despite uncertainty until a point of illumination and new growth to rationalizing and justifying why you do not have to try harder or lastly, denial and giving back to old models or the worst-case scenario of giving up. (Kosonen, 2018: 224) Coming up with excuses for why you do not have to try harder is easy and I can also say that I have come face to face with these situations but taking those moments as possible points for growth and reflection is a part of the creative process that nurtures the growth of identity. Kosonen adds that "despite the strategy we use, the most essential act is to stay with the work and learn to tolerate the uncertainty of not knowing and the fear of not being able to solve the problems – yet. This tolerance may become very beneficial for us, as Shauna McNiff (1998:22) notes: “If we are able to stay with a situation, it will carry us in a new place.” (Kosonen, 2018: 224)

A helpful moment for me in understanding that uncertainty and moments of frustration are and most likely will always be a part of the creative process (and that this is okay) happened during my internship in my BA studies. An artist who I saw as successful and skilled opened a ceramic kiln to find it full of displeasing results. They talked out loud, half to themselves and half to me that they sucked and could not do anything right. Despite this, they seemed to quite soon move on to thinking about how to fix the situation and I realized that every artist goes through these moments of frustration no matter their age or experience. As unfortunate it is when something does not work the way you hoped, I will try my best to pass those moments and appreciate what I can learn from them.

"Fears about yourself prevent you from doing your best work, while fears about your reception by others prevent you from doing your own work." (Bayles & Orland, 2001)

2.2.3 TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

Moving on from the feelings of uncertainty and fear, the creative process can also foster positivity and feelings of accomplishment and confidence. In the words of Kniveton: "Through the creative process, one can explore their thoughts, desires, and insecurities. One can build on ideas in the production of artistic work with narrative and storytelling (…) to tell a story to process life events." (Kniveton, 2017: 4) Kniveton's study focusing on how the making process can foster a stronger sense of self showed that most of the participants gained more self-esteem during the creative process of the study. (Kniveton, 2017: 27) Some participants even worked on their art project connected to the study in their free time. Kniveton linked this to the sense of accomplishment that is deeply intertwined within the creative processes. This kind of sense of achieving positive results from being creative and being happy with something that you have made is certainly an encouraging feeling that can help in gaining more trust, self-esteem, and a stronger sense of self.

So the benefits of a strong sense of identity include being able to trust yourself and the vision you have, your talents, and the process. According to Lingo and Tepper, handling for example failures and pressure while keeping one's passion, purpose, and goals in mind is on a sturdier base with a strong identity and trust. (Lingo & Tepper, 2013: 352) Piazza agrees that trust and the ability to see one's accomplishments and improvements in persisting difficulties as Deborah in Piazza's study communicated about the increase of trust in themselves and their skills as a result of engaging in creative work, (Piazza, 2017: 265, 266) it can be agreed that creative work is an excellent way for self-discovery and gained confidence.

In addition, I would like to mention the aspect of self-portraits as they can also be an effective way for identity reflection through creative work. This method is mentioned by Travis who introduced it in their study on artist identity formation. The self-portrait could be in the form of a written narrative, painting, sculpture, performance, or any other form of creativity resonating with the person. (Travis, 2020) Through self-portrait, the amount of reflection and questions of the self are immense, and so forth can be beneficial for identity development. Creative work usually leads to reflecting on yourself, your experiences, and feelings as the creative process and the end results are often very personal. Thinking of what is truly important to you, what you want to express through your work, and which parts of your identity are something that you value is beneficial. If creative work can make you question what is truly important to you in your identity and help to express those sides of selves, it is rightly constructive.

2.2.4 INSPIRATION

Firmly connected to identity and creativity is the concept of inspiration. Throughout our lives, we naturally have different interests and inspirations that we enjoy and some of these are a stronger part of our identity which we might value and carry within us for a long time. This cluster of interests and inspirations, many of them also unconscious, form the base of one's identity, creativity, and so forth. We can be的影响ful for identity refection through creative work. This method is mentioned by Travis who introduced it in their study on artist identity formation. The self-portrait could be in the form of a written narrative, painting, sculpture, performance, or any other form of creativity resonating with the person. (Travis, 2020) Through self-portrait, the amount of reflection and questions of the self are immense, and so forth can be beneficial for identity development. Creative work usually leads to reflecting on yourself, your experiences, and feelings as the creative process and the end results are often very personal. Thinking of what is truly important to you, what you want to express through your work, and which parts of your identity are something that you value is beneficial. If creative work can make you question what is truly important to you in your identity and help to express those sides of selves, it is rightly constructive.

"Fears about yourself prevent you from doing your best work, while fears about your reception by others prevent you from doing your own work." (Bayles & Orland, 2001)
or sculptures but like Moon suggests: "many different art forms might be used as vehicles for envisioning our work, including music, dance, drama, poetry, and visual art" (Moon, 2002: 32) By exposing the self to inspiring content, one can also understand aspects of other’s works and styles that could be beneficial in one’s own process. Brinson writes that; "After a little of this, you’ll start to see yourself moulding the different aspects of these artists into one another, and into your own style. Without thinking about it, you will have taken what you love out of your most inspiring artists so that you’re left with the style that represents you." (Brinson)

In conclusion, finding inspiration from various sources and sides of art can make your own creative work thrive in a more fruitful way. We are often inspired by multiple factors, for example, I look at sculptures and paintings while I am also very heavily inspired by topics such as anime, manga, fashion, toys, music videos, and games. As Moon mentions “…the various manifestations of the arts feed and nurture one another” (Moon, 2002: 33)

Before the creative process of this thesis, I often looked at others’ work for inspiration in unvaried forms of art, completely forgetting what I am actually inspired by on a deeper level. This led to many pieces that I do not feel express my truthful identity well enough or at all. During this thesis process, I have further realized the importance that looking at different aspects of art and everything outside of it for inspiration has for my creativity and the development of identity. Especially during the beginning of Covid-19 isolation, I noticed that I struggled to keep feeling inspired because of not being able to visit museums, see people, experience culture and arts but I understood how much inspiration I am able to draw from anime, games, or as an example, looking at fashion such as Tokyo Fashion’s Instagram site. (instagram.com/tokyoftashion) These are only a few examples but during this process, creating mood boards full of inspiring content has immensely helped me to understand the vastness of my sources of inspiration and I have further realized the magnitude and importance of some specific influences that have affected my identity and the impact of them on my creative work. By contemplating on the concept of inspiration I have also become more aware of the parts of my narrative and identity that I would like to emphasize through my work. In the chapter “My creative process” I introduce more in detail how I searched for inspiration through creating mood boards of my identity.

2.2.5 OBJECT IN RELATION TO IDENTITY

"Art is created by an artist, but it also creates the artist." (Díaz: 8)

As you leave a mark of your identity into an object, it becomes part of you or a reflection of your identity. Since the goal of creative work is usually a physical manifestation expressing parts of your identity, it is interesting to ponder on how the creative process and these artefacts impact one’s identity development.

The work you create acts as a culmination of identity while they both move and shift in dialogue and the object adapts to the current sense of identity. Being in constant interaction, identity affects the creative work and other way around, so I believe that not only your identity affects what you create but these works resulting from the creative process are also impacting your identity so there is a dialogue between these two. In other words, “an artifact makes its creator as much as the creator makes the artifact.” (Culpepper, 2018: 101) In this way, what you create plays a part in the construction of identity. Continuing with the words of Warnier: “…objects embody the techniques and the knowledge of their creator. In turn, they imbue the creator’s senses and body knowledge. …The experience of making (…) changes the maker’s subjectivity, just as the act of making, changes a material into an artifact. Each artifact alters its maker and vice versa.” (Warnier, 2001)

Being a reflection of the interchange between the maker’s identity, materials, and society (Culpepper, 2018: 63), these works are a combination of creative choices that stem from identity and experience as well as the environment and culture that affect the choice of medium, materials, and colors, etc. Culpepper states that “…each choice affects the others and renders the piece an avatar of sorts marking its and its creator’s culture, society, time, and place.” (Culpepper, 2018: 59) Kosonen also describes that the identities of designers are built or based on the artefacts they produce. (Kosonen, 2018: 25) When the end result of a creative process is an object, there is always some kind of connection between the maker and the object. The interaction and your reflection of yourself through this creative work can be crucial in forming your identity in the field of arts. As a result of a strong sense of identity, it is possible to create personally meaningful pieces which again can help in developing one’s sense of identity further and gaining more trust in oneself. According to Mijares, having a strong sense of identity makes you create meaningful works because of the gained higher self-esteem and trust. (Mijares, 2019) When the object resulting from creative work is a reflection of your personal narrative and identity while creating new experiences, values, or feelings, I believe that the viewer is also able to better relate to these or find their own meaning in them, and strengthen also their own identity through them.

“Art is created by an artist, but it also creates the artist.” (Díaz: 8)

Likewise, the exhibition “THE OBJECT AS MIRROR” that “explores the roles of objects in the construction and reflection of our world and ourselves” (projects+gallery, 2017) examines the relationship between humans and objects. According to the description of the exhibition, likewise of the clothes we wear and the art we display, “…the objects we create and acquire manifest the concept of who we are. They are both a product and a reflection of ourselves and the world around us” (projects+gallery, 2017) and are used to signal who we are or want to be and where we want to belong. (Jarrett, 2013) Lastly, the following quotation is an example focused on homes and the objects they withhold but I believe that it can be reflected in the objects we create as well. “As our lives unfold, our things embody our sense of self-hood and identity still further, becoming external receptacles for our memories, relationships and travels.” (Jarrett, 2013) So objects can reflect identities, our memories, and inspirations and in the same way that your home can reflect your identity through the objects that it involves, also the objects we make can be extensions of ourselves. (Batt, 2018)

2.2.6 CREATIVE SPACE

I want to mention the aspect and importance of a studio or a dedicated space for creative work as I believe that having a peaceful space for creating, exploring, and reflecting has a positive effect on the development of different aspects of one’s identity such as creativity. In Piazzas’s study on art major’s artistic identities, (Piazzas, 2017) many highlighted it’s importance, and the studio space was often described as “home” and a place for “refuge and calm” (Piazzas, 2017: 39) Piazzas describes how making this space also allowed “making space for their creative selves and their identities as artists” allowing for exploration of identity on their terms and in peace. (Piazza, 2017: 39) Having a creative space also legitimized their artistic identities while validating their roles and the feeling of being a professional. (Bain, 2004) Culpepper brings up similar thoughts through the results of their study, writing that participants communicated feelings of satisfaction as they not only had the time but also a space for creating where they could feel comfortable. (Culpepper, 2018: 205)

This quote from Sjöholm describes well what the studio space can be: “…it is a space of reflection, a room for study and solitude where the learned artist can withdraw and dwell; it is also a workshop where the artist is invited into skilful exploration; to trial- and error-based practice and to material exploration, engagement and enchantment. The studio is a space for exploration – a space where artists, through their collected and gathered materialities, dare to be brave, to elaborate and try new things out. In the self-constructed workspace of the studio artists feel confident and emotively secure and, therefore they dare to change; to move on. A studio offers a certain familiarity in which artists can find new ways in their making." (Sjöholm, 2013: 20)
In conclusion, based on its expressive, exploratory, and reflective nature, creative work offers many possibilities for expressing one's own identity in different forms and materials and it is beneficial for identity development as there are possibilities for making meaning of experiences, gaining trust, confidence, and understanding of the self. The importance of a dedicated space for creating as well as the immense importance of understanding one's personal inspirations and internal motivations to the development of identity and in finding ways of expressing it were also described. The creative process and the works created are intertwined through identity and the dialogue between them. In the "My creative process" chapter I describe my creative process which functions as one example of how one might use creative work as means to develop and express their identity.
In the chapter “Identity”, I mentioned the impact of society, labels, and expectations for identity and I
would now like to open my own struggle between thinking of myself as a designer and as an artist
and how I have reflected on the meanings and ways of combining these two identities. One question
that I faced at the beginning of reflecting on my identity and how to show it through creative work was that
I felt like I have many sides in myself, some even conflicting. Through literature, I realized that actually, in
agreement with McAdams (McAdams, 2001: 102), the understanding of identity is usually not based on
the person being one but rather a combination of multiple sides of the self and these different sides form
the identity. McAdams actually writes that issues of identity might become a problem when adolescents
or young adults realize that they could be many different things but as a result of society, feel the urge to
be one, integrated being. (McAdams, 2001: 102)
I have never felt comfortable about the idea that I would have to be something singular since I am
interested in many subjects and hold multiple topics meaningful to me. Additionally, the feeling of freedom
has always been important to me and it is from here that this pondering upon labels and expectations
derives from. So one of the starting points of my thesis work was that I wanted to combine different sides
of myself as a student of design who is shifting more and more towards fine arts. As voiced in the very
beginning, identities can be further categorized into for example personal, professional, artist, or creative
identities. All of them are considered to withhold different aspects of identity that are often seen to be
not intertwined but I do not believe that I need to separate my personal and professional identities from each
other. Actually, on the contrary; I believe they can further flourish each other and within creative work, it is
always interesting to truly see the person behind the pieces. In agreement with Kosonen, professional and
personal identities are intertwined in artistic fields and so forth questions of identity include both
sides. (Kosonen, 2018: 2) Of course, some aspects of one’s identity are more present depending on the
situation but during this thesis, I have tackled my own misconception that my professional and personal
identities should be separated.
As an example of labels of society, or the school environment, I have struggled with the idea of a
designer vs. artist identity and not understanding from the beginning that I can define my identity as
what I want. Overall I do not like the system of labeling people in different groups that lock them into
specific thought-to-be norms and expectations. This is maybe why I started to feel restricted by the labels
of what I am studying. Shedding myself from the ideas of norms, labels, and expectations that mostly I
set on myself has been of vast importance to me. As a result of this common idea of one or the other, in
this case, a designer or an artist - mindset, I have at points struggled with thinking that because of my

3.1 INTERFACE OF DESIGN AND ART

Because of my struggle with the idea of the designer vs. artist identity, I found it helpful to examine
what is in between or on the interface of design and art to see where I place my past, present, and future
selves. I started to research the idea of the interface of design and art because of my interest in working
with both and to find ways to fuse them together. I saw it as important to go deeper into researching and
describing the context where I place myself because through that I can better understand and explain
my narrative and identity. Actually, in the middle of my thesis work, I came to the understanding that
my path is taking a stronger turn towards fine arts but I still believe it to be relevant to go through this
research of the interface of design and art because my identity still consists of both sides and I am still
interested in the ways they might weave into each other. I also believe and know that there are others who
ponder upon these same questions as I have so understanding more about this context can be helpful for
those people as well.
I would like to start with the notion that design can be seen as a minor, or applied art from fine arts but
while, according to Leerberg, the design field is covering progressively more ground and it makes less and
less sense to seek answers to the question of what design is, (Leerberg, 2009: 1) there are still commonly
held ideas and definitions about it. According to Lovell, design would traditionally be defined to be about
finding solutions to problems and working with restrictions dictated by materials, manufacturing
techniques, function, aesthetics, and price. (Lovell, 2009: 7) Lovell describes that today, designers are not
only designing products but also processes, systems, and interfaces and continues to draw the picture of
the vast variety of the design field by giving examples of different ways of working from the virtual
realms to being “ankle-deep in wood shavings, forming and shaping objects by hand – much as other
craftspersons have done for thousands of years before them.” (Lovell, 2009: 7)
While design and art are closely related creative disciplines, both resulting in creations or artefacts
(Jensen, 2015: 64), it still seems to be agreed that there is some kind of an invisible line separating them
and functionality is in the spotlight of this debate. It is like a spectrum where the function is on the other
side with design, art on the other, and in the middle, there is a void of objects in limbo while people try

This is about how I identify myself and how I want to work. To repeat the words of Sachs “... I feel closer
to the soul of an artist than a designer” (Lovell, 2009: 35) or perhaps in the words of Kosonen, I could say
that I am “at the artistic end of the design axis, where one’s own vision and creativity plays a strong role”
(Kosonen, 2018: 121) Regardless, because the field of arts, be it design or fine arts, is where I embody and
express my identity I feel it to be valuable to offer an insight into this part of my journey with identity.

I studied my BA in Design and MA in Contemporary design but from the beginning, I was more
interested in the artistic courses and my focus has been strongly on ceramics. During my studies, I noticed
this inner battle with the word designer as I was more interested in art & personal exploration within creative work and courses that focused on these matters. Especially in the beginning of my BA
studies, I had this idea of a designer based on norms and myths of a person who had to be somehow
specific, a problem solver interested in industrial design who needs to separate their professional identity
from personal aspects in order to be successful. I have of course come to realize that this is not the only
way and there is a vast variety of designers and ways to work but I still struggled to shed these ideas out of
my mind. In any case, from the beginning, I noticed that the label of a designer was not fitting for me but
I do feel lucky that these studies have taught me a lot about my creative process and while I have learned
about design, I believe I will continue to go towards fine art such as sculpture and painting. Although,
this does not mean that I want to discard the aspect of design and function altogether which is why I have
pondered upon the question of how to combine different aspects of these two, for example in the form of
functional but sculpture-like objects.

In this case, a designer or an artist – mindset, I have at points struggled with thinking that because of my

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or young adults realize that they could be many different things but as a result of society, feel the urge to
be one, integrated being. (McAdams, 2001: 102)
to label them to either end. Poynor reflects on Norman Potter’s ideas of the bridges between a designer and an artist and how “the designer must deal with matters of practicality and function, while artists are free to do what they like in pursuit of their self-chosen goals.” (Poynor, 2005) This example shows how the lines between what a designer and an artist do, are often quite strictly defined with functionality, and differences in matters of freedom and autonomy. I aimed to research pieces that are questioning these boundaries and limitations because in agreement with Poynor, if we broaden our ideas of what design can be and embrace different perspectives on it, different opportunities will open up. (Poynor, 2005)

The fluid and evolving interface between design and art (Coles, 2007: 15), “...the intensification of transgressions across design and art has been described as resulting in an almost dissolution of the boundaries” (Jensen, 2015: 3) and according to Jensen, they are further challenged and pushed forward by hybrids or objects fusing elements of both. (Jensen, 2015: 3) The dissolution of these boundaries has also sparked critique towards this act of fusing the two which has led to ideas of imaginary patrols guarding the borders of these two terrains (Foster, 2003; Rawsthorn, 2013), and even with these borders becoming unclear and broad, there are still distinctions coming from discussions on both sides. (Foster, 2003; Rawsthorn, 2013) Jensen writes that this merging of design and art has been illustrated by using analogies of border crossing or dissolution of boundaries. (Jensen, 2015: 2) In order to develop new ways of working and expressing, both fields have expanded beyond what they have been described as. (Hammerstrøm et al., 2011: 4)

Coles also mentions that today’s practitioners seem to move or less move freely across the borders of design and art in contrast to this being seen as transgressive and out of the norm before. (Coles, 2012) The term transdisciplinary, which is also used when talking about the interface of different disciplines, is described as the knowledge that does not have clear boundaries between disciplines, something that is between, across, and beyond disciplines. (Coles, 2012: 17) It is used today when designers or artists are not defined by disciplines “…but by the fluidity with which their practices move between the fields of architecture, art, and design” (Coles, 2012)

3.2 CONCEPT OF DESIGN ART AND HYBRIDS

A growing number of designers are questioning the definitions and restrictions of design which led me to look deeper into the term design art as the objects I was interested in and inspired by were often described as such. In order to further open the process that led to the end results of my thesis, I consider it to be useful to offer this context because going deeper into it has been a part of my creative process and a part of reflecting and constructing my identity.

“In the design world, attempts to account for the interface between art and design have led to a new interdisciplinary hybrid: designart, a way of working which attempts to apply the characteristics of the most traditional type of art – uniqueness, expressiveness, autonomy, eccentricity – onto design.” (Coles, 2012: 16)

I will start with Rachael Allen’s questioning definition of the interface of design and art: “When a new way of working comes along, it means new categories of products, new ways of selling them, and new words with which to talk about them”, one of them being the term design art. “It has been generally accepted that design art generates a small number of high cost objects which sometimes have nothing to do with being functional. It can be questioned whether this is just ‘new’ design, a start of a new movement, a fashion fad, or simply art. The answer to this is something that will emerge over time depending on how the work is received.” (Allen, 7) As stated by Coles, engaging both in art and design simultaneously, design art as a term is meant to describe borderline cases between these fields. (Coles, 2007) “The term is used both about artworks which engage with design and it is used as a term in relation to experimental design created as limited editions and one-offs” (Agudio, 2013) which often result in furniture-like objects. (Jensen, 2015: 6)

Both spellings of the term are used, designart and design art but reported by Lovell, the credit for the term design art was initially given to Alexander Payne in 1999 who said that: “I used the terminology back at the turn of the millennium to create a provocative and interesting concept for people to discuss and debate. It was very interesting to look at how design and art and architecture were fusing and melting into this one language and barriers were being broken down, lines were being blurred.” (Lovell, 2009: 111) Lovell writes that Payne’s goal with this word was to help communication between buyers and sellers through linking the term with contemporary pieces and for example prototypes and limited edition pieces. Despite this, in 2008 Payne retracted the term because of the critique towards it but despite this, it is still used in describing prototypes, one-offs, and limited series. (Lovell, 2009: 111) To understand why this term might still be in use could be explained for example by Poynor’s thoughts about how these two words, design & art separately do not explain the evolution of our visual culture anymore. (Poynor, 2005) According to them, understanding that design can also be means of personal and cultural expression is needed. (Poynor, 2005)
"I'm trying to push the boundaries of my profession and my profession is making functional pieces for a market." (Lovell, 2009: 16) The emphasis of design is on functionality and by questioning this, the practitioners are challenging the roots of design in order to offer something unique and thought-provoking. (Lovell, 2009: 16) These pieces often seem to be used as a way to criticize (von Oppeln, 2011) for example our way of mass-producing cheap products with a short lifespan using materials that are harmful to the environment or towards old-fashioned, strict ideas of what a designer or an artist are supposed to be like. Also, it can be a means of questioning everyday culture (Jensen, 2015: 82) with questions such as "how do we use and interact with furniture and other objects? and how do we value the object and the materials used?"

Bringing the discussion forward from the term design art, Jensen's choice of the word "hybrid" describes the merging of design and art, while emphasizing that because the term design art is problematic since its variety of meanings and the discarding of it by many writers, the term hybrid does not place emphasis on the design versus art aspect. Jensen describes hybrids to be contemporary manifestations that have points of contact between design and art. (Jensen, 2015: 74, 75) Fusions or hybrids of design and art can be seen to reflect both of their histories but by combining the two disciplines, “… which respectively have a focus on either industrially manufactured objects or art objects”, (Jensen, 2015: 96) they land in the “in-between” or the interface of two fields. Additionally, there is a huge variety of words used from simply design or art to design art, fusions, hybrids, limited editions, functional art, or collectible, critical, and experimental design. In agreement with Jensen "…what is interesting is not to define or label these projects as design or architecture as the defining feature of these works are that they are the results of a fusion of the, traditionally divided, non-functional and critical role of art and the functional role of architecture and design." Jensen proposes to evaluate them as both; functional proposals and as artistic statements. (Jensen, 2015: 204)

One explanation why design and art have become more difficult to distinguish from each other is the way works are often presented in a way of an installation and because of their sculpture-like aesthetics. (Meltzer, 2011: 94) The sculptural aspect of these pieces is not overlooked in literature and it was also one of the points of interest for me. These sculptural qualities of design are a result of taking distance and distinguishing from the restrictions of what is seen as design (yatzer.com) and it could in some degree be called something where approaches to design are reinvented. An interesting question to ask would be that does your background and identity affect how the objects you make get called and where they are placed at? If an artist starts making “artsy” furniture, will it most likely get called art, and if a designer does the same, even if they make the same object, will it more likely be called design, or when is it something in between?

On multiple occasions during my research, I have come across the word utopia being linked with the topic of merging design and art. "Striving to reach the state of utopia is a quest that has brought the two disciplines together on several occasions." (Coles, 2007: 14) So in some ways can these objects be called utopias or idealistic perspectives? In any case, the reason for this engagement seems to be the search for more autonomy and possibilities for self-expression and provoking thoughts about for example our ways of consuming or using products. Personal exploration, one's own identity, and re-creating the rules for creation is in focus, instead of the restrictions of functionality and mass-production. According to Taylor, it still does not mean that there would be a wish to fully distance from the culture of design or to be outside of it (Taylor, 2011: 258) but as Lovell writes: "These designers are committed to experimentation, to exploring not just the nature and forms of what they produce but also the systems within which they are commissioned, created, received, displayed, appraised and used." (Lovell, 2009: 7)
My exploration into my identity has been focused on the creative and visual side of it but since one's whole narrative and different life events affect the development of those, I made a simple mapping of moments that have impacted my creative path and I pondered on what I have been inspired by before and how it has affected my current self and the ideas of my future within creativity. Piazza also noticed in their study that the process of becoming an artist involves contemplating identity in terms of past, present, and future perspectives. (Piazza, 2017: 258) This chapter introduces parts of my narrative and showcases some of my previous works and future wishes to create a base understanding of where I have come from in order to be able to grasp how my identity has developed.

This narrative starts from a small city called Rauma where I grew up being the youngest in a family of six and where I lived until I reached the age of sixteen. My interests in school and in hobbies have always been geared towards arts and I have long known that my passion is in fact in creativity. I have this kind of cliche story of a teenager in a small town where they often felt like an outsider in a place that was lacking in diversity and people who I would relate to with my interests. Nevertheless, I have always tried to keep the courage and interest in being myself and developing my identity outside of expectations. Since I was thirteen, I have explored and experimented with my style and for example, the color & length of my hair has changed multiple times. I like the idea that in a way your identity never has to be ready since you can always change things about yourself and develop yourself & your values forward. I believe that everyone's identities are small parts of phases throughout our lives continually organized into a new, expanded version. This is why cherishing experimenting and changing for example one's appearances can be a part of developing and expressing the fluidness of identities also as an adult.

From quite early on, I started to dream of living in a bigger city, meeting more people that I would relate to, and being able to go to art events and have more life around me. This is why it was definitely a dream come true for my almost seventeen years old self to get accepted to the Helsinki upper secondary school of visual arts and move to Helsinki. I did not yet know what forms of art I wanted to engage with but I was extremely happy to be in a school focused on arts and I believe that those years also gave me more courage to apply for Aalto University and truly aim for a career in arts. I was extremely happy to be in a school focused on arts and I believe that those years also gave me more courage to apply for Aalto University and truly aim for a career in arts.

When moving on to slightly more recent works, the overall look is more colorful and while functionality is still present in some works, I was engaged in more fine arts, sculptural shapes, and techniques such as painting. Through these works, I have been able to move forward to better express myself since from every project I have learned more about what I want and what I would now do otherwise. My true inspirations were not really showing yet so the objects I created were not fully coherent with my identity and did not reflect it that successfully but aspiring to truly find one's own way can be a conscious decision and I am slowly learning to express my true self through what I create. During this thesis, I have further understood that I should strive to focus on creating my own world of creativity and through that find the audience for it rather than trying to first find what the audience might like because in any case, not everyone will enjoy what you create and that is totally okay.

I have thought a lot about how one's works represent specific moments of their lives and how their identity and creativity were at that time but like identities and creativity are fluid, so is the nature of the work you create as a result of that. This following quotation from Bayles & Orland describes the possible relationship between the person and their old work in a relatable way: "Old work tells you what you were paying attention to then, new work comments on the old by pointing out what you were not previously paying attention to. Now this would all be smooth and lovely except that new work can turn to old work in an instant — sometimes, indeed, in the instant immediately following the work's completion. Savoring finished work may last only an eye-blink. This is certainly unpleasant—but it's a good sign." (Bayles, Orland, 2001: 100)
The result of my bachelor’s thesis was a kinetic sculpture. Even though visually it does not look like something I would make now, it was an important process as it further lifted my interest and courage to work with sculptures.

This artwork portraying nine lakes from around the world was created on a course focused on exploring one’s way within artistic work. I loved the independence and freedom to explore and truly enjoyed learning more about working with fine arts through this artwork.
This sculptural chair is a result of me getting more excited about using other materials in addition to ceramics and combining functionality with art. I was inspired by minimal sculptures and combined this with abstract ink drawings that I often create at the beginning of my creative process.
4.2 FUTURE WISHES

Since I cannot have photos of my future work, I created mood boards with pictures that somehow resonated with what I hope to see from my creative work in that future. These chosen pictures showcase various forms of creating and ways of combining art with commerciality. Nowadays, I am overall a much happier person and I believe this to reflect into my future ambitions and into this colorful imagery. Creating these future mood boards helped me to understand my visual style better; there is usually a contrast between saturated, bright colors with dark tones which combine different sides of my identity.

I have never been the kind of person who plans their life far ahead but nevertheless, I do think about it and dream of it. Only a bit ago I thought that after graduating I would mainly work on design projects such as making tableware for restaurants while doing art more "on the side". I have become more ambitious and have also learned to trust myself and the fact that I can become a full-time artist if I invest the needed time and resources in it. My first step after this thesis is to rent a studio to be able to focus on different forms of art and to further create my own way. I believe that clay will stay as one of my main materials but I do not want to restrict myself to it as I wish to try new techniques with a diverse range of materials. Besides continuing on small-scale works I also envision and dream of working on a large scale and I believe that sculpture might become one of my main topics to explore. On top of this, I have gotten particularly excited about painting and it is something I want to continue to practice as it feels like a gratifying way of expressing myself and learning more about the use of colors. The process of painting is at the same time enjoyable, satisfying, and nerve-racking which is why it is teaching me a lot of patience through the slow process.

With my future artworks, I hope to bring joy through colorful and happy-looking anime & pop art inspired imagery, but I also strive to use my voice through art to address different issues and allow reflecting on them. I strive to raise money through my sales to different causes with topics such as human rights, the wellbeing of animals, and other environmental causes. These are some ways for me to include matters that are important to me and also give the buyer a feeling that they are contributing to something good on top of getting a piece of art for themselves to enjoy.
I want to introduce three artists that have inspired me as they have helped in reflecting on my future goals and to understand the broadness of what an artist can be. I have also looked into many collaborations combining fine art and commerciality such as fashion companies working with artists or two artists from different fields merging their skills. These have been very inspirational in a way that it motivates me to construct my own way of creating and a visual world that can be used in multiple ways and on different platforms such as clothing, products, and interiors, or for example games & animation.

Three of my current artist inspirations are Takashi Murakami, Billie Eilish, and Brian Donnelly who is better known as KAWS, all of whom have also worked with interesting collaborations and even with each other. What started as a friendship through Instagram, Murakami and Eilish have for example collaborated in the form of a music video (Eilish, 2019), clothing for Uniqlo and a figurine of Eilish. What unites and what I admire about these artists is that their artist identities are strong and variable in a way that they can be extended into any scale and form of art or commerciality while being very recognizable.

Interestingly, being also one of the inspirations of KAWS (christies.com), Murakami has gained iconic status in Japan and globally from their art and working together with for example Louis Vuitton, Supreme, Pharrell Williams, Billie Eilish, Comme des Garçons, and KAWS. This has helped Murakami in gaining a vast global audience and making a name among many who are eager to collect art. This is also the case with KAWS who has also collaborated with for example Supreme and Comme des Garçons, Astro Boy, Nike, Dior, MoMa, and Travis Scott.

Not long ago, artists working with fashion and commercial products were seen as negative and as the art dealer and gallery owner Perrotin mentions, the artist, in this case, was often seen as a so-called “sell-out”. (Perrotin, 2019) Perrotin continues that while there was this lingering stigma of the 1990s, in 2007 when Murakami collaborated with Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton, “…it sent shockwaves through the art world—people couldn’t believe an artist would do anything so blatantly commercial—and its popularity helped rewrite the rules for how artists could interact with a general mass audience”. (Perrotin, 2019) I am fascinated by these artists due to how they fluently expand the idea of what an artist can be and do as they blur the lines between commercial and fine art. KAWS and Takashi Murakami are great examples of artists who use commerciality for their advantage and for sure it has great benefits for the artists since it enlarges their markets and the “hype” that is built around them. On top of this, the admirers of these artists are of course thrilled to for example wear their art through fashion. Art is not anymore just something that you place on a wall or in a form of sculpture. It can be engraved in fashion, the music world, animations and movies, art toys, and plush toys. All of which can also offer more affordable ways to collect art. This is what inspires & interests me and I am imagining and placing my future self to this idea of a comprehensive artist.

What I love about KAWS is their paintings and sculptures varying from small and toy-like to massive public art pieces, all of them impressive, and heavily influenced by a background of growing up with influences from graffiti art and pop culture, especially American cartoons. This is something that I share with KAWS since I have also always watched and loved for example the Simpsons, Spongebob SquarePants, and Mickey Mouse to which KAWS is referencing in many of their works and as I have mentioned, this influence from cartoons and anime is what I aim to implement into my art as well.

Finally, the reason why Billie Eilish is inspiring to me is not only their music but overall their visual identity, kind personality, and vast talent. As they are seemingly a genuine person who is not afraid of voicing opinions about societal issues and whose personal style I admire, I have been inspired by them. In the same way, as with KAWS and Murakami, Eilish’s visual or creative identity can be transferred into projects outside of their main way of creating as well. Lastly, Eilish has also brought up their love for anime and for instance recently collaborated with Bershka with a line of clothing heavily inspired by this. In addition, the music video by Murakami and also especially the music video for the song “my future” (Eilish, 2020), directed by Andrew Onorato is more like a short anime movie and because of my love for these topics, it has made me cheer louder for Eilish. I appreciate all of these artists with strong creative identities since they have clearly found their own ways and are very open about their inspirations and expressing the influence of the topics mentioned, which are often deemed childish but which actually have very wide audiences. This is also why I have gained a lot of courage from them to express my identity.
To conclude my future wishes, I aim to have my own creative studio where I can work on establishing my visual world that can be modified into different forms through art such as sculpture and painting to products, spaces, and whatever imaginable. Through expressing my identity with creative work I want to reach an audience who relates to the topics I will work with and establish a community of supporters around my art. A great example of doing this well is Jynwaye (@jynwaye), who currently creates anime inspired clothing and whose audience I believe could be somewhat overlapping with mine. Jynwaye smartly engages with supporters by showing glimpses of their creative work while asking for opinions and in this way making the audience feel engaged & important and by releasing limited edition series they have created a high demand and excitement around the pieces. Lastly, through their social media, it is possible to almost feel like you know them as a friend which makes you eager to support them by collecting those pieces of clothing. I am also planning on creating unique and limited edition series so seeing their business and community management skills has been inspiring as they have accomplished to create a tight community around them who keep supporting and getting back for more.
This chapter introduces my creative process behind three objects created as part of this thesis. It works as one example of how one might develop their identity through the creative process and express said identity with creative work. To give an insight into where I started from and where I ended up, I will start by describing how I initiated this process by creating mood boards and studies of color and forms that were, in various ways, the starting points to all of these pieces. I have developed my sense of self and the creative side of my identity progressively during this process and gained more knowledge on how to express it through my creative work. As I have explained, I have struggled with what I call myself and was in conflict with what I wanted to create or how to do it. This process has taught me about experimentation with materials, ideas, and myself and led me with the confidence to go towards the challenge of expressing myself truthfully and to have more patience in the process. I ended up creating three different works that are still connected through parts of my identity. I kept working with all of them to explore different ways and materials in which to express my identity and process. I ended up creating three different works that are still connected through parts of my identity. I kept working with all of them to explore different ways and materials in which to express my identity and to see what in the end feels like my own way because as Kosonen writes, in the context of design, "...trying out different materials and tools in design is similar to trying out different roles in identity work. Through envisioning and experimenting we discover what works for us." (Kosonen, 2018: 213)

5.1 INSPIRATION

Finding what inspires us, makes us joyful and passionate is at the core of developing one’s identity and was also the starting point in my creative process. As written by Brinson: “Inspiration is one of, if not the biggest motivator in artistic expression. You will hear more success stories come from people that have a boat of inspiration than from those who simply sit down and force it.” (Brinson) I have been in those situations many times as well when I have been trying to force ideas out of myself. Now that I have spent a lot of time reflecting on my identity, its creative part, and my inspirations I feel more motivated and inspired to create and find my own way than ever but still, sometimes it is better to just take time off from the creative process to do something completely else. Trying to force ideas out often leads to being in a narrow-minded, tunnel vision mode (Brinson) but as Kosonen states: “when the focus is temporarily taken away from the creative work, subconscious parts of the mind work on the problem.” (Kosonen, 2018: 214)

So my creative process started with finding inspirational content and references that somehow resonated with my identity and with what I would love to create. I did not yet know what I wanted to create, but I knew that it somehow needed to be an expression of my identity. This is why I searched for inspiring content on a very broad scale which in the end has resulted in over two hundred pages of pictures since I kept adding more and more during the process as my understanding of myself grew. It was extremely beneficial to take time to go deep into what evoked feelings of joy and inspiration in me. In the end, these mood boards express different sides of my identity and my goal was to combine them into objects. In this chapter, I will present a small portion of this vast mood board to help grasp a feeling of my identity in a visual way.

I started by adding photos of existing products, artworks, and overall objects, mostly ones that I saw somehow as fusing elements of design and fine art which were stemming heavily from my research into “design art” and the concept of boundaries of those two. But quite soon I remembered and grasped what was my goal with these mood boards. It was to remind myself of what I am inspired by outside of already existing objects that in the end express someone else’s identity even if I relate to them. After this realization, I started to dig deeper and the pages of my mood board started to naturally turn into a quite linear visual narrative of the sides of my identity and there were a few prevailing themes or feelings attached to them. It starts as in a way soft and cute, with mostly pastel colors which remind me of myself when I first found the Japanese influence that I mentioned before. From there the theme starts to go darker and could be described with words such as metal or punk where the prevailing colors are black & red and this in a sense visualizes the phases where I have been more into those subjects. Next up the pictures show a lot of street fashion and colorful art with graffiti and anime. There is a visible increase of color while still having elements of both of those previous themes, with colors such as neon green and yellow, purple, red, turquoise, and pink popping out.

Repeating themes and topics from these mood boards are the Japanese influence of the streets of Tokyo, anime, pop art, and fashion. The contents vary from playful and cartoony fantasy worlds with vibrant colors to abstract art and sculptural furniture. What follows throughout everything is the contrast between cute and bright to gloomy and dark. It has been interesting to notice how through the time I have spent on this process I have already developed my sense of self and what inspires me. The mood boards have been a great tool to see that because I already feel connected from some of the pictures I added in the beginning and have found something new and more inspiring to add. This method has worked very well for me and I believe that I will keep adding and deleting pictures while my identity and my own way progressively grows clearer. I also believe that these mood boards will be a great tool for moments where I feel less inspired and can use them to rediscover, get inspired, and collect the things that I love in the form of pictures.
PASTEL / CUTE

James Jean

Mad Dog Jones

Mr.

Jazmin Anita

Jennifer Mehigan

/f_loguan
DARK / PUNK

61. Tokyo Ghoul
62. Dilara Findikoglu
63. Jamie Hewlett
64. Gage Lindsten
65. Kotaro Chiba
66. Fruits
SCULPTURAL / MINIMAL / ABSTRACT
5.2 FORM

Originally I thought that I would have done some sort of material research and experimentation at the beginning of my process but I understood that it would be more beneficial for me to first think about the shapes and to choose the materials accordingly. This was because actually, I was not interested in developing new materials but to learn more about the ones I would like to continue using in the future.

When I first took clay into my hands to sketch with, I did not yet know what I wanted to do, but I had worked on the mood boards to see what inspires me. I looked for shapes from those pictures, but mostly I formed the clay intuitively, testing forms and compositions. These first tests turned out to have a variety of forms, some very abstract and organic while others were sharp and figurative which made me feel confused about how to combine these opposing feelings. From these forms, I had one favorite that I imagined being a sculptural chair. I continued to develop this idea of sculptural furniture that was inspired by those “design art” pieces which were often sculptural but functional. From here on I made multiple different variations of objects envisioned to work as chairs or small tables. Also, many of them were somehow dealing with the aspect of balance and imbalance through a few simple elements that were balanced on top of each other.

I did not sketch the objects on paper much but instead started sketching with clay quite fast to perceive the favored forms. I later went back to ink sketching to draw more shapes that emerged from my mood boards to evoke inspiration and make the direction to go clearer. As mentioned, these shapes and forms were a mix of abstract and figurative shapes and I felt slightly lost on where I should go next, but I decided to continue with more quick clay sketches. This experimentation generated results, and it was a good way for me to free myself from the fear of starting. By doing something that did not have to look good or finished, I was able to freely explore shapes and the emotions coming from them. This was only the start and even though it yielded results I was a bit frustrated because I did not feel that they yet expressed what I wanted them to. After reflecting on the reasons for this frustration I understood that one of the reasons was that one of my starting points was to explore the use of color and naturally these sketches were the color of the clay. Color is something that I want to implement into my work for them to express my current identity better so I decided to move on to other methods and leave the forms into the background for a moment and delve into colors.
Sketching forms found in the mood boards to understand repeating themes and possible directions between abstract and figurative topics.
5.3 COLOR

When I started to paint I was disappointed at first because my expectations were so high and believed I would be in a perfect flow and fireworks of creativity would spark around me once I started. I am often very critical and demanding of myself, but I am slowly learning to stop in those moments to breathe and take a break or continue while trusting the process and understand that things cannot be perfect immediately, if ever, and practice is always needed to succeed. Once I got past this feeling of frustration, I enjoyed experimenting with paint & colors and I created many small paintings and color tests to find what evoked a sense of joy in me. Since experimentation serves as a stress-relieving manner to free yourself (Kosonen, 2018: 213), even just mixing colors can be helpful experimentation in getting into the flow of creating. I felt more inspired and motivated to work because I was able to implement aspects of my mood boards and the inspirations I have to these paintings more successfully than into the first clay sketches. I also used some pictures as bases for the paintings to bring colors from the mood boards into my work and to make myself use combinations that I normally would not.

In the end, I looked at all the small paintings that I had created and divided them into themes by colors, and made color charts based on them. At this point, I had a large variety of colors which I would still want to simplify, but it was interesting to notice that I managed to mirror the themes of the mood boards; the pastel & cute, dark & punk, and lastly, the bright saturated colors. The overall look is quite dark but with hints of colors that pop out. Again, I noticed how I enjoy these different sides of my identity which I could express through arrays of colors and by the contrast between them.

After finishing the paintings, I combined other materials with them and photographed these fusions. By using for example colorful acrylic sheets and jewelry and by also altering the colors in Photoshop I created a visual world to work as an inspiration for myself. This is something that I have not done before, but I enjoyed that Photoshop allowed me to create color variations fast and easily. As I wanted to create something new to myself, something that would express sides of my identity, I noticed that it was valuable to also try new techniques and ways of working, to find something new in the creative process. By combining acrylic sheets and jewelry with the paintings, I was able to create interesting layers that created their own visual world with abstract shapes and bright colors. I felt like I was getting further with my identity, creativity, and in expressing myself as I managed to create something that I was excited about and believed would result in the creation of something personal.
5.4 THE ARTWORKS

5.4.1 ENVISIONED SCULPTURAL OBJECTS

The forms of these objects continued from the abstract clay sketches, many of which had elements of sculptural furniture and were influenced by my research into the interface of design and fine art. Continuing from those first clay sketches, I built multiple miniature prototypes using cardboard, clay, wooden sticks, acrylic sheet, paper, and paint. In the end, what I enjoyed about the objects I constructed was the colorful world that they created together which connected them to my visual research and the collages that combined painting with various materials. They also continued the feeling of imbalance and tension between minimal or primary shapes that created a kind of a rhythm between elements.

I proceeded to create more small prototypes of these sculptural objects, adding ones that I imagined to work as light fixtures, mirrors, and tables. Eventually, I had three favorites that resembled a table lamp, a chair, and a mirror which I felt were playful and something that would evoke curiosity. Actually, at first, I thought that the production part of this thesis would be to finalize those three objects but as I took a break from working on them, my identity and the sense of creativity kept evolving and I had other ideas that I was also interested to proceed with. Because of this, I planned that I would only continue with one of these objects; the table lamp, in addition to also continuing with other ideas to grasp a wide understanding of my possible paths within creativity. Despite this, my plans changed once again as I started to go further with two other artworks and dived deeper into their processes. I got more excited and inspired by these two works, and with my timeframe, I decided to leave the table lamp only as a miniature prototype. I will see if I am still interested in continuing these ideas of sculptural interior objects later but for now, as I learned more about myself, I understood that these objects did not evoke as much joy and passion in me as the other ideas did. Lastly, to have sufficient time to explore different paths of creativity, I had to leave something out and I did not see the value in forcing myself to hurry and finalize any of these envisioned objects as I felt that I could get further in constructing my identity if I moved on to something that was more enthusiastic about. The other two works are presented later in this chapter but the reason why I first wanted to showcase these envisioned interior objects is that this is where my creative process started even though it did not end with finalizing any of them. This process still helped me to explore and perceive my way further.
Sculptural objects envisioned as tables, chairs, and a floor lamp (on the left).
From all of the objects, this playful table lamp became my favorite. It combines different elements seen in the ink and clay sketches that included minimalist blocks in contrast with flat, organic, and "noodly" shapes. The bubble which would hide the light source is almost like blown bubblegum bringing softness in contrast to the sharper edges. With a range of materials and by adding both, glossy and matte surfaces I could create contrast between the textures. For the materials of the final object, I would choose wood for the rectangle and the asymmetric piece, metal for the tube, clay for the white middle part, and glass for the bubble on top.
5.4.2 TUULIKKI RABBIT

I want to start by saying that Tuulikki is my middle name which, until the last few years, I never really connected with. It is also my mother’s middle name and in Finnish mythology, Tuulikki, the daughter of Tapio and Mielikki, is a forest goddess. The connection to my mother and this finding made me reflect on it more and understand how nicely it resonated with my identity and with the more nature-connected side of it. My goal was to create something that would truly express my identity, the different sides of it, and the direction I would like to go towards. This work has come far from the aspect of design and its functionality but I truly enjoyed creating something so personal and something that I feel is like the alter ego of my identity.

So the idea of this Tuulikki rabbit is to be a culmination or a visualization of my identity. First of all, on top of the name, it brings forth my love for rabbits. Ever since I was a child I have strongly related to these creatures and had multiple rabbit toys, decorative items and I would always get birthday cards with pictures of them. I also wanted one as a pet and even though I never had one I still had a book about how to take care of them which I studied carefully. Ever since then, it has been in a sense my spirit animal and that is why Tuulikki also resembles a rabbit. Another reason is that with this character I aimed to combine and express cuteness and toughness so the rabbit corresponds to the cute side and through its facial features, proportions, posture, and outfit, it highlights the contrast of different sides that are embedded in my identity.

I envision developing this character further and using it in various ways and with different materials & colorways because I believe that it can have infinite variations depending on its outfit & accessories and the form & scale. With further development, it can become a recognizable character that I could use in many forms of art, collaborations, and commercial products but first, my goal was to develop the character and cast it in porcelain. Although I first intended to only use the name Tuulikki for this character, I have further thought about using it as an artist name. Since this character is to some extent an alter ego, the name feels fitting for this purpose as well.

INSPIRATION

While the first mood boards that I presented have certainly been a part of creating this character as well, after creating a few initial sketches, I proceeded to also collect inspirational pictures for this specific piece to find the direction to go to. I focused on sculptures, art toys, figures & collectibles, and different existing cartoon and anime characters with often human-like proportions. Also, I searched for photos of clothing and accessories that I could implement into this character.

So-called designer or art toys that have inspired me in the creation of this character are interestingly blurring the boundaries and distinctions of art, sculptures, toys, and collectibles. The artworks of KAWS have been a repeating occurrence in my mood boards, and in fact, they were a massive inspiration and a source of courage to try something completely different from what I have created before and to go towards designing my own character. The forms of KAWS’s artworks are in between fictional characters and somehow humane proportions which was inspirational to me. Despite this, KAWS has not been the only inspiring artist during this process and the following pictures show a variety of artworks and artists.

108. Quiccs

109. KAWS
KAWS 111.

Javier Calleja 116.

Hikari Shimoda 114.

Luaiso Lopez 110.

Sanrio 115.
From the beginning, I had quite a clear sense of how the head could be, that the character’s arms would be crossed and that it would have a spiked collar, but otherwise, the body was a big question mark. My vision of the form became clearer through sketching but once I had to go beyond a flat surface, creating a satisfactory form in clay turned out to be much more challenging. I looked at photos of rabbits, the shape of their head, and the proportions of their bodies and tested multiple options with quick clay sketches. I understood that in the end it was not supposed to resemble an anatomically correct rabbit but instead my vision of one and of course the final human-like figure brings it even further away from a real rabbit. One aspect to why designing the body felt so difficult could also be that I usually mostly draw faces because I feel that the rest of the body is not my strong point but this is just because of the lack of practice.

I have never designed characters so it was challenging but also fun & enjoyable and of course, despite the long process, this is only the first proper version and I can continue to further develop it later. In conclusion, looking at various existing pieces with different styles, proportions, and levels of detail helped me figure out what could be my way with it. The goal for it was to be “cute but badass” and the form and proportions of course have a massive impact on whether it is seen as purely cute or as a mixture of cuteness with toughness and edge.
Clay prototypes with various forms to find the direction to go with.
I wanted the Tuulikki rabbit to have interesting details in its outfit but at the same time, it had to be quite simple since my goal was that the final version would be cast in porcelain and this process would be more challenging the more details it would have. Admittedly, leaving a couple of the final details out would have made the mold-making process easier but these details had a big impact on the overall look so after consideration I could not leave them out.

What I love about this character is that I have the opportunity to express different sides of my identity with different variations of it. There are infinite variations for possible postures, proportions, colors, outfits, and accessories which I want to continue exploring but I still had to choose one outfit for this first piece. Through exploring simple but diverse options I ended up choosing a hoodie, jeans, a puffer coat, sneakers, and a spiked collar. One benefit of having a shirt with short sleeves would have been to be able to paint tattoos on the character but this I might then end up doing with another version. For the shoes, I had three main options; sneakers that could resemble Air Jordan 1’s or shoes resembling Balenciaga’s Triple S model or Dr. Marten’s Jadon platform boots. I made sketches of them to study their separating factors from other shoes and ended up going towards the Air Jordan 1’s. It was challenging to make the shoes and their details as simple as possible while still staying within the shape of the famous sneaker. In the end, one might find some resemblance but they are of course a very simplified version with slightly exaggerated proportions as the rabbit's feet are large in relation to the rest of its body. For the accessories, the nose piercing is a defining feature of its face as it is of mine and I also added a small metal hoop as an earring to some versions after the firing process.
Steps from the process of creating the final form from clay.
CREATING A SILICONE MODEL AND A PLASTER MOLD

My goal was not only to make one sculpture but to be able to cast multiple & create different versions through colorways and to do this I had to produce a plaster mold for slip casting. After the clay model was ready, I proceeded to make a soft silicone shell on top of it to be able to cast the same model from harder silicone. A detailed model made from clay would not be as durable as a silicone version and this way it is also possible to easily remake parts of the mold or make a second one if needed. This mold is so far the most complicated one I have made and already the idea of it made starting the whole process slightly terrifying. Luckily, I got plenty of help and encouragement from the studio masters Tomi Pelkonen and Roel Meijs.

The clay model was first carefully covered in silicone and a plaster frame was made on top to support the soft silicone shell for when the harder silicone would be poured in after the clay model was taken out. This process was quite straightforward, but because of the complicated shape of the folded ear, I did not manage to get the silicone into it. An air bubble occurred in the tip of the ear as well as in a few other places but the ear was fixed with metal wire and wax, and the others filled with clay when needed in the making process of the mold.

Because of the number of details on the character, the plaster mold ended up having eleven parts in it. The spikes of the collar had a separate plaster mold and were added to every sculpture individually after casting because having them in the model would have made the mold making process all the more complicated. I started the mold-making process from the back of the character since it could be done simply with two pieces. After this, I moved on to the front where I had to make quite many of the pieces at least two times, one of them five times. This was done to adjust them to come off without force and to not get stuck on the model as this would mean they would also rip the casted clay version. The mold for the spikes of the necklace was made by first sanding a drill bit into the desired spike shape and using it to drill holes into a small piece of plaster. For the future, I envision having a plaster mold with the possibility of changing all of the individual parts of the body separately, meaning that I could mix and match pieces of plaster molds with different clothing and heads to have variety in the postures and facial expressions.
The finalized plaster mold closed and opened (on the right).
SLIP CASTING

After the plaster mold had dried for a week it was ready for the first slip casting tests in which a liquid clay called slip is used to fill the mold. The plaster will absorb the water from it and a wall of clay will form. The excess clay is poured away, in my case after around twenty-five minutes. Next, the sculpture dries in the plaster mold before it is opened. Because of the intricate form, I had to wait for almost two hours to be able to open it safely. Usually, a couple of the first casts do not work, for example, because the mold is not yet absorbing the clay properly and it takes some time to learn the best way to use your mold.

From the first casts, I noticed three problematic spots on the mold that would always get stuck on the sculpture and damaged it. These were parts of the dropped ear, the chest, and the ankle but by slightly sanding the forms of those specific plaster pieces they started to come off quite nicely. While sanding pieces of the plaster mold will also change the form of the final cast, in this case, they were minor changes that did not noticeably affect the overall form.

Because the whole casting process was rather slow, I made a second mold. After being able to cast two at the same time, the work that I had put in started to feel more rewarding as I finally started to see multiple sculptures coming out of the plaster molds. The next day after casting, the seams can be tidied and after that, they are ready for bisque, the first firing. In the end, the success rate of the slip casts was quite high even though amongst them were also some unfortunate individuals, some of which were not salvageable anymore.
I kept the surfaces of the first three finalized pieces simple to first just see how the form would look after high firing. One without a glaze, one with a glossy transparent glaze, and one with a glossy black glaze. I was delighted that they kept their form well and looked as I had hoped. For the next trials, instead of the transparent glaze, I used white to achieve the desired, almost paint-like look. I also altered the glazes to be thinner as the thickness made some of the details disappear. The matte version shows the details slightly better but on the contrary, also the seams are more visible.

I was eager to try making the nose piercing and the spikes of the necklace silver because I believed that even with a simple white glaze, having a few silver details would bring a more finished and detailed look to the artwork. I applied materials used in porcelain painting; white gold for the first tests and then platinum. Both were painted on top of a glazed, high fired object, meaning that the object needs a third firing at a lower temperature. These tests were successful but the silver color is more noticeable with the white base as the reflections of the black glossy glaze conceal the silver of the spiked collar almost completely. Painting on top of the black glaze was also a lot more challenging because when unfired, the color of both, white gold and platinum, is brown which made it look almost transparent on the black base. Another challenge of this technique is knowing how thin or thick the layer should be as it can easily come out as cloudy if too thick. This was not a problem or at least not noticeable with small areas but I made one full silver version in which, when examined up close, the color and shine are not even. In any case, I enjoy this look and I feel that it fits the character well so I will continue practicing the use of this method.

After these tests, I wanted to move on to bright colors. This led to frustration because I wanted to achieve bright and even results but this seems to be quite the challenge with materials meant for ceramics. I did a test with underglazes to paint all the clothing items with different colors but it did not turn out as nicely as I hoped. The colors are not fully even and they blend into each other slightly so it ended up looking quite nice from afar but not so much as you get closer. Also, in this first version, I brushed on the white glaze of the face and it did not smoothen out as I thought so the surface is not how I wished. I still like the concept of having the clothes with different colors and plan on continuing to explore ways to achieve brighter colors.

For the same reason, for the frustration of not finding bright glazes, I did a few tests with spray paint which worked out nicely and by applying a gloss varnish on top I achieved a glaze-like appearance. These spray-painted versions were first fully fired, then the silver parts masked with latex to prevent the paint from sticking to them, and lastly, the latex was removed after the paint and varnish had dried. I like these results greatly, but I will also continue researching the possibilities of glazes to seek ways of achieving similar results without the use of paint. Similarly, as with the outfit, there are infinite options within the use of color. With my timeframe, I was able to try a few different versions but as the material research for glazes is time-consuming I intend on continuing afterward.

**SURFACES**

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Test tiles of underglaze colors used to paint the rabbit shown on this page.

Platinum lustre is used to achieve the silver color.

Spray painted versions with a gloss varnish. Spikes of the collar were masked with latex to protect them and the latex removed once the piece was dry.
Two final versions of the Tualikki rabbit in my home.
5.4.3 PAINTING: “YOU SHOULD SEE ME IN A PAINTING”

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how Billie Eilish and Takashi Murakami have been inspirational to me. As I love both of these artists separately but also the work they have created together, they felt like an interesting combination to portray. Both of their strong artist identities, ability to be versatile, and the ability to combine art with commerciality in the shape of for example fashion and a variety of products is fascinating to me. Simply said and seen, this painting is a portrait of them but for me, there are more layers in it as I have expressed my own identity through them, and at the same time I feel that it is a portrait of my current self. This painting has been a way for me to reflect on my identity and how I could combine different interests. From these, it brings forth elements of anime, manga, fashion, and Japanese pop art all of which are parts of my identity that I hoped to find ways to express. The name of the painting is a reference to Eilish’s song “you should see me in a crown” and its music video, which Murakami directed.

For me, painting is something that I have picked up again in the last couple of years. In a way, I have always enjoyed it and throughout my life, it has been a part of my creative work in some ways but I still had this idea in the back of my head that I am not good at it. I was able to free myself from this thought only when I understood that there is not only one right way to paint. That it does not necessarily have to look realistic and through practice I could find my way in it. Because of these realizations, I felt like I could free myself to explore painting more.

One course that also got me more interested in painting was “Personal exploration” where we were encouraged to use unfamiliar ways of working in the final piece. I created a large, two-sided painting which I loved working on. After this, I also took another course where I learned to make canvases and was free to work quite independently and explore my way. During the latter, I tried multiple techniques and both, abstract and figurative topics and I also got interested in experimenting with combining other materials to my paintings such as acrylic sheets and spray paint. These experiences gave me more courage to further practice this technique of creating as I found it extremely satisfying and calming, something where I would get lost in my thoughts once getting into the flow of painting.

With this painting, I experimented with combining spray and acrylic paint because I wanted big, even surfaces, and using spray paint made achieving this very quick. Although, I did start from the beginning once because I was not happy with the first background. My original idea was to have multiple colors in it but in the end, it did not work. With the complex background and the characters that would have quite many colors and details in them, it would have turned out more intricate than I hoped. After realizing this I tried to save the background with a different technique, in the end realizing it was even more complex. I was upset because if the background was not salvageable anymore it would mean that I would have to start the painting again and I had spent a lot of time sketching the characters which I would have not wanted to redo. I felt defeated. After a bit of a meltdown, I understood that I would rather do it well and have it be something that I like, even at the cost of having to sketch the faces and clothes again. One positive thing from this was that I was able to cut the previous canvas and use it in masking the parts that I wanted to protect from the spray paint. This was easier than when I first used tape and paper to do this, and luckily, I had made and primed two canvases of the same size and could start the new one immediately. On the second run, I chose to have the background only in one color to create a calmer look.

The Louis Vuitton reference in the painting brings it towards the world of fashion and shows mine and their interest in it. The colorway of this specific logo print (on the right) is based on Murakami’s design for Louis Vuitton in 2003. Painting this colorful print taught me a lot of patience as it was very time-consuming because of the small details and multiple layers to make the colors even. I used a stencil cut out of thick paper, but as the results were not perfectly accurate, I had to go through the print a few times to clean and sharpen the edges. Still, this made creating the print much easier as I was able to repeat the same shape fast and it helped in keeping the distances of the elements the same. The flower on the yellow hoodie is one of Murakami’s most famous designs used in literally every way, in artworks but also in commercial products. I wanted to bring this iconic flower to the painting to bring something very recognizable to it.

I struggled with painting the shadows and highlights of the faces and found it difficult to understand how they should be placed as it is something that I have not really practiced before. They did not need to look real as the style of the whole painting is cartoonish and they still had to be in a way natural and effortless. I wanted the overall look of the painting to be quite “flat” and this was the case with the shadows and highlights as well so I looked at pictures of anime and manga characters to learn how to achieve the style used in them. The creative process of this painting has been a great learning experience from the techniques of painting to finding the defining features to include to express my identity and these two artists.

I found painting especially Murakami difficult as he is older and this would need to be taken into consideration for example with wrinkles and grey hair which I have not done before. I realized that I am only used to drawing and painting seemingly young people and I struggled in finding a good balance between keeping the overall look of the painting quite “flat” but still managing to make Murakami’s skin and hair look appropriate to their age. I felt that the simplified style of the painting made this more challenging. As a reference for this, I looked at pictures of older characters from anime.

I have always loved drawing faces the most so creating a portrait felt natural although usually I have drawn and painted imaginary people so this brought a new kind of a challenge to me. In the end, I am happy about the result but even more so about the progress in skills that I have gained from its creative process. Most importantly, it has molded my understanding of my way of painting and creativity. I enjoy the simultaneous simplicity and details that create an interesting combination, and I would love to continue developing this style further.
Phases from the painting process.
Final 75 x 75cm painting.
Since my goal was to create something that would express my identity, I analyze whether the artworks succeed in this or not and in which ways are they expressions of it. This believe also answers the critical question of whether or not my understanding of my identity and ways of expressing it increased because of engagement in the creative process? I also ponder on how the creative processes were beneficial in perceiving and constructing my identity to examine the possible answer to my research question: “Can engaging in creative work result in a deeper sense of identity and ways of expressing it?”

These artworks are the results of creative processes where I wanted to gain a better understanding of myself and how to express my identity through creative work. The creative processes made me engage in a lot of self-reflection and going deep into my inspirations, into who I am and who I want to be as a person and as an artist. Although these works vary from each other in topics and materials, they are united by aspects of my identity as they combine facets of different worlds such as the ones of anime and cartoons, abstract and pop art to fashion and art toys. Of course, while being expressions of my current sense of identity, they do not define what I might be tomorrow but despite that, these artworks have been a way to explore, reflect and understand my identity and its creative side so in a way they have been the tools for this exploration.

This process of exploring one’s self and one’s sense of purpose through the creative process greatly benefits from being conscious about one’s aims and the process itself. When we only create without questioning & self-reflection, the results of understanding identity are surely not the same as when the process is geared towards this goal. So that this process can be quite conscious at least in the beginning.

This could mean for example writing about oneself and one’s goals, gathering inspirational content that resonates with one’s identity, using different methods, and exploring new ways & perspectives in the creative process. I have been engaged in creative processes for a long time but not in the same way as now, not with a goal of understanding my identity. I now believe this to be important for gaining these benefits of the creative process. If one’s mind is set into an exploratory mode and there is a willingness for uncertainty and big questions such as who one is, what they want to express, and how to do that, the creative process can be a great tool for more awareness. By all means, not every project has to start with these questions about identity and how to express it. Considering that it surely becomes more natural with time and as the knowledge and understanding of one’s self grows, this process becomes more subconscious. But to start, it is beneficial if this practice is more conscious and one takes the time to reflect and explore different ways, inspirations, and sides of their identity it is they want to embody in their creative work.

Building and understanding one’s identity is a continuous process. The more one is engaged with creative work, the more one’s understanding of identity naturally grows. So it is a long process and not something that a specific project will cover but it can be a start. And as identities shift and change, so will the creative work which is why one needs to continue exploring and challenging themselves to express their identity accordingly. One can use different methods to work with the matter but I consider the most important need and aspects to be time, self-reflection and being open to exploring & also failing, and over coming uncertainty and fear. I believe that the creative process offers possibilities for all of these aspects.

These three works are quite different from my previous ones which is why I feel that I have constructed and developed my identity and my way as an artist significantly further. From these works, the rabbit sculpture and the painting express my identity the best and better than any of my previous work. This does not mean that I now perfectly know who I want to be as an artist and what kind of work I want to create. Still, I can confidently say that I would not be this far in understanding these matters without taking this time to consciously engage and explore within creativity. Experimentation and exploring different materials, techniques, and ways is necessary to find what one enjoys and does not feel is suited for their way or does not express them as hoped. I took the time to experiment with different ways and materials to reflect on my identity, inspirations, and sides of my identity. In a way, the creative processes of the three works are different but in a way, they are one. They have all made me question the same things such as what is the way to go forward, which inspirations resonate with me the most, and am I on the right path? Does the process and the object bring me joy and inspire me further? Does it embody my identity? Is the identity that it embodies including sides from the past, present, and future selves?

One reason why the creative processes of these works were so beneficial and offered plenty of knowledge for me about my identity is that I was able to have the freedom of purely focusing on myself. It might sound odd but to have a good understanding of ourselves we need to analyze our identities outside of others. Of course, as I have also mentioned, society and the people around us affect us and can even be beneficial in understanding aspects of ourselves, but to find who we are and what we are inspired by, we also need to turn into ourselves and ask & explore. As this creative process has been a personal work, not for any course or a customer, it gave me a new kind of freedom and time to ponder. The fact that no one was telling what to do, there were no guidelines or themes and everything was open, made starting quite terrifying. But as I saw the wonderful sides of it, that I could do anything and everything, it brought me joy and excitement. The acquired knowledge from these creative processes will also help me in projects where there might be themes, guidelines, and restrictions as I will better know where and how to start and how to implement my identity into different projects in various ways.

Understanding the direction one wishes to go towards, disconnected from others, outside of expectations is important and this can only be done by the experience of creating and pondering upon what is important in one’s identity. This sense of identity I believe is crucial in creating personal works that at the same time tell about the creator through the inspirations embedded in it, but through this, it can also make others relate to them. For me, these three works have been the moment where I truly started to pay more attention and consciously construct my identity. They are only the start but I can say that without this process of going inwards and distancing myself from, for example, the school environment, I would have not been able to understand who I am as sufficiently. Now I believe that I have the tools to continue this identity and artist journey through creative work. I also feel that working within fine arts has allowed me more freedom in expression and more ways to implement my inspirations than what I feel my previous works did.

6.1 ENVISIONING SCULPTURAL OBJECTS

I want to start by mentioning something about the processes of all the works; I found creating mood boards about my identity extremely useful and helpful since I could collect as much inspiring contents that I could just find and continue adding or deleting pictures as my identity developed. Looking at visual content and finding what I hoped to express was the most useful tool and a great way to start the process.
Other beneficial methods were sketching with clay & paint and creating collages with the paintings and various materials to photograph them and have these visual, colorful representations of my inspirations. I cannot point these methods to any specific work since they were the starting point in my creative process and they have affected all of my works. Through them, I understood that I did not know which I enjoyed more: abstract or figurative topics. I still enjoy both but as the creative process went further, I understood that the figurative side could be my way but I just did not know how to create this and lacked the confidence to step into the unknown. I had not practiced it and so I did not have my own way in it yet. As I have always loved cartoons, anime, and different characters from them, they have always been a huge inspiration but I did not yet know how to implement this into my work. In some ways, creating abstract objects felt easier for this reason, and starting to practice being more true to my inspirations and creating something figurative felt overwhelming.

I learned to listen to myself and trust my intuition more and go towards what felt right and move further from what did not evoke positive feelings. In the very beginning, while sketching with clay, I felt like I was hitting a wall. Once I was able to move on to what felt right and focus on what inspired me, learning to use more colors, I was then also able to bring those initial clay forms into this work. The fact that I decided not to finalize these objects, initially felt like giving up or that I was not doing the best I could. I then realized how much I still learned from this; the importance of letting go of something that does not feel good or inspiring. It is of course possible to go back to those objects in the future, but it is also totally okay to move forward to new without feeling bad about it. This moment in the creative process helped me to understand my way better not because I created something to the end but because I stopped and was able to go further from there.

The creative process helped me to understand which ways of working function for me and how I should start. I learned that I was not so interested in material research, but more in forms and color, and understanding these matters already helped me in perceiving my identity more. In a way, I forced myself to find new ways of working to learn how to express myself better than I had before. I knew that my old ways would not bring me where I wanted, but still in the beginning, I felt a lot of uncertainty and got frustrated because I did not know where the process would then lead me. Throughout this creative process, I did not feel much confidence even though I had moments of enjoyment and trust as well, but I could feel that I had not yet cracked the question of how to express my identity and different sides of it.

I look at these envisioned interior objects but I cannot decide whether I still feel connected to them or not. In a way, I would love to see these works finalized, but at the same time, I do not know if I see my present or future self in them but rather some parts of my past self. This creative work was the first one that I proceeded with after creating the mood boards, sketching with clay, and exploring the use of color. I feel that I had not yet found ways to truly express myself, but was rather going with something familiar and something that resonated more with my previous works.

These envisioned objects indicate where my identity was when I started this creative process and the process of consciously constructing my identity. They were a way for me to explore the interface of design and fine art, functionality, and sculpture, but the idea of finalizing them did not give me joy and confidence which made me feel more disconnected from this work. I understood that I was not necessarily going in the direction I hoped but I did not yet know what that direction would be. Still, I could feel that these objects did not yet express what I hoped to express. They still convey me in some ways through the abstract shapes, bright colorways, and contrast between forms but as mentioned, they express more my past identity than the present one. Through these, I can see and acknowledge the growth of my creative self in this relatively short amount of time and see the positive change that this process has evolved my work into. The fact that the latter works, the rabbit figure, and the painting already express me more is proof of the creative process being beneficial for my identity construction.

6.2 Tuulikki Rabbit

This visual formation of my identity represents who I am and brings together my narrative identity, past, present, and hopes for the future. With it, I feel that I am moving towards the direction of finding my way of creating and ways of expressing my identity through creative work. It resonates with different parts of my vast mood board and indicates my interest in for example sculpture, the world of art toys and collectible figurines, cartoons, anime, and pop art. This is why I am confident that it already expresses my identity and goals better than my previous works. To me, it feels like an expression and an extension of my identity, and as I have heard these same feelings from others, it makes me even more sure of it since this shows that it is not only in my head but is also visible for others.

My sense of identity, who I am and want to be as an artist has developed immensely as a result of creating this artwork. Since it is very different compared to my previous works, it allowed for new perspectives and ways of creating. I now have a clearer idea of how to express myself and how I could continue forward. Even though some aspects could be better with further enhancement, I am still very pleased with what I achieved with it. I could claim that as a single object, it is the one that has taught me the most about the direction I would like to go towards. I can say that because of this creative process, my understanding and sense of self have changed for the better and I have come further from the beginning moments of doubt and uncertainty to learning plenty of valuable knowledge and skills. Without leaping into this project that seemed and also was extremely challenging, and without continuing this creative process, I would not have the skills and understanding of my identity that I now have. This is why I am grateful for this process as it taught me to go towards the challenge of exploring my identity within creativity.

Simply, why the creative process helped me in developing my understanding of my identity and how to express it is that it allowed the time to explore who I am and want to be. I had never stopped to think, explore and engage with creating work on such a personal level and in the same way as with this process. It allowed me to in a way recreate myself and try something new and also more complex with a familiar material that offered new perspectives about its possibilities. I aimed to find something that would motivate me to create and find my way in creativity and to feel more confident about graduating. This artwork ended up being this for me as it inspires me to continue improving and exploring this direction further. In this way, I believe that there has been and is an interaction between this object and my identity as they both influence each other.

I have wanted to explore sculpture for quite some time now, especially in ceramics, but for some reason, I have not dared to go for it. Succeeding and getting feelings of achievement has made me understand
that I can and should go for what I long for. I think that the biggest reason for me being unsure about exploring figurative topics and sculpture is that I have studied in the design department and have not studied sculpture, but I now understand that I can find my way in it regardless. This process has given me the courage to be ambitious and go for things even if they feel scary. I also believe that I can learn and construct my identity progressively further with practice and experience so I have certainly gained understanding, trust, confidence, and ways to go onwards from here.

6.3 PAINTING

I wanted to expand my ideas of what an artist can be to understand who I could become. One way in which we form identities is by fusing parts of something or someone into ourselves to form what we want to be. This painting portrays two icons, both of whom have elements in their creative work or identities that represent something I wish to implement in mine. I found it interesting to ponder on how to express myself through portraying someone else. Undoubtedly, the expression of my identity starts already with the fact that I chose to include these specific artists as they resonate with my own identity and tell something about my interests. Nevertheless, even though the base of the painting is these two people, I have expressed myself through the elements included in the painting and, for example, I would love to wear the imagined clothing from it. To a certain extent, and as a combination, these two and elements of their personalities and how they express them represent different sides of myself as well. Beyond this, it also expresses my interests in topics such as pop art, anime, music, and fashion.

Exploring my identity with painting gave me many new challenges such as firstly understanding in which way I could convey my interests and my identity by painting. My confidence was like a roller coaster during the process and it was a surprisingly emotional journey going in between stress and uncertainty to trust and joy. It felt like a big challenge because I aimed to do something new for myself and to improve my painting skills and my way of portraying people. Because there were so many new aspects in the process, I did not always know the best ways to do things which led to frustration and having to repeat some phases and layers of paint.

Yet the process taught me that I want to continue practicing because I enjoy the calmness of painting and how it allows you to create anything that you can just imagine and draw on the canvas. I further learned that I enjoy the combination of simple, minimalistic surfaces combined with a fair amount of details but little enough to keep the overall look simple. In the end, I have gotten a lot more confidence in my identity and the fact that I will be able to achieve good paintings with practice. This is what all the three processes have taught me, that I need to be more patient with myself and remember that I cannot be great at everything at first. Learning patience and faster & faster ways to paint has lifted my enjoyment in the process of it as well. When I look back, I now know how to do certain parts of the painting process better, for example, that I should always mix a bigger amount of paint and store it to avoid having to redo a whole layer just because I had to fix a small part and could not mix the previous tone perfectly again.

Ultimately, I did learn more about how I could combine different influences such as fashion, anime, and pop art which deepened my understanding and confidence that I can fuse different elements of my identity in my work. The challenge for me was to portray these two people through my own identity and style of painting which I was at the same time trying to develop. My sense of who I am as a painter and overall as an artist has gotten stronger and what I learned from this process I can also use later in my following works. Even though the process of it included plenty of frustration and uncertainty I am still able to look at it and grasp those learnings and the improvement.

Conclusively, same as with the two other works, the process of creating this one has also changed my sense of who I am, my way of working, and my idea of how I want to continue after graduating. There are ways in which the painting could be better but this makes me more excited for the next one as I have learned more and know what I should do differently. I do believe this work to be on the right path towards finding my way in painting and why I also believe that the creative process was beneficial for my identity construction was once again the importance of the aspects of self-reflection and expression that it provided me with.
CONCLUSIONS

With this thesis, I aspired to achieve more knowledge about it and how engaging in creative work could result in a stronger sense of identity and a better understanding of ways of expressing it. I aimed to perceive and further develop my own identity, the means of expressing it, and envision possible future paths through the creative processes of three artworks. By doing this, I hoped to gain more confidence and trust in showing my identity through my work. Additionally, by researching the topic of fusing design and art I pondered on my struggle with labels and expectations that I had attached to myself through my studies in design and was on a journey towards finding new ways of expressing identity. This process started by considering how I could combine aspects of design and art but in the end, I moved towards engaging more with fine arts such as sculpture and painting in order to successfully express my identity. Gergen and Czikszentmihalyi's quote that the artist discovers facets of the self through creative work and identities who they are through this self creation (Gergen & Czikszentmihalyi, 1976) thus allows me to believe it to be as well and it is how I have felt during this process since creative work has helped me to reach and explore deep inspirations and my desire to create art. I believe that the core of how the creative process can benefit identity construction is the aspect of time. Time for self-reflection and experiment that allows one to test and reflect on their identity and ways of working. To answer the question "Can engaging in creative work result in a stronger sense of identity and in ways of expressing it?" I reviewed various literature, created three artworks, analyzed their creative processes, and pondered on what was my sense of identity grew or not. By analyzing both, the literature and the results of my creative work I have concluded that being engaged in creative work can indeed be beneficial in reaching a stronger sense of identity and the creative process can help in further constructing ways to express this identity. In addition, I believe that this process benefits from conscious self-reflection and in questioning one's ways is needed to reach a better understanding. Starting this thesis by being conscious about one's aims of exploring the self, sense of purpose, and ways of working is important when one is conscious about this aim, there might be more willingness for self-reflection and different questions such as who is one about, what are they passionate about, and how to express this through creative work. This belief is rooted in what I learned from my creative process and is said without forgetting that this process can become more subconscious and this might not be the case with everyone as the working methods vary for everybody. This is also why to find one's own way we need exploration of possible paths and methods.

Self-reflection and experimenting with one's ways can bring uncertainty and frustration but it is necessary as without this we cannot grow our understanding of the self. The creative process invites me for this reflection as one ponders on who they are, what elements are embedded into their identity, and how to express it. Different methods and tools such as writing, creating mood boards, and simply exploring different topics, inspirations, and ways of creating can teach us valuable information about ourselves. So the creative process can be a great tool for more awareness & understanding. I also consider that the process of expressing one's identity surely becomes more natural with time and as the knowledge of one's self grows, this process becomes more subconscious. But to start, it is beneficial to take more time to reflect and explore different ways, inspirations, and what aspects of identity one wishes to embody in their creative work. Furthermore, as identities evolve and change, one needs to continue experimenting and reflecting on one's ways in order to understand how to express the evolving identity. This means that building and understanding one's identity is a continuous process which is why one needs to practice and allow time for themselves since the more engaged with creative work, the more the understanding of identity increases. So I do believe that being engrossed in creative work can help in constructing, understanding, and expressing identities, but it is a self-reflectatory, exploratory process that does not happen overnight but is one that continues to develop as one keeps creating and their identities growing. One can find confidence, trust, and certainty of who one is and what could be one's way in creativity, envisioning, experiment, and exploring different ways with various materials and techniques is necessary until one finds the ones that bring the most joy. As one starts to find their direction and understands how to express themselves, the trust in one's self naturally grows. Envisioning the future can help in understanding if one's current ways are corresponding to their goals and what they hope to create. If one's identity and creative work are not in union, this can lead to frustration and confusion of who one is. This is what happened to me as well, by practice and exploring different ideas, future scenarios & materials. I believe that it is possible to gain a better understanding. I also consider that the creative process can result in a higher level of confidence and trust, even though, during the process, one's feelings can be more like a roller coaster. In the end, the gained confidence and trust are some of the most beneficial and powerful aspects of being engaged in a creative process. Kniveton's study focusing on how the making process can foster a stronger sense of self showed that most of the participants gained more self-esteem during the creative process of the study. (Kniveton, 2017: 27) The benefits of a strong sense of identity include, for example, being able to trust yourself and the vision you have, your talents, and the process. According to Lingo and Tepper, handling for example failures and pressures while keeping one's passion, purpose, and goals in mind is on a sturdier base with a strong identity and trust. (Lingo, Tepper, 2013: 352) Creativity represents a way to understand and actualize the self (Karwowski, Kaufman, 2017: xvii) which is why the creative process echoes the identity formation process. (Piazza, 2017: 276) and according to Lingo, art can "provide a way to reach people in their private areas of the self and give them hope and their desire". (Moon, 2002: 7) So creating is a way to understand, define and communicate who one is to themselves and others, but grasping the way one wishes to go forwards, disconnected from others and outside of expectations is important to find one's ways. As Piazza writes: "Through the act of creation participants in my study were in the process of "making themselves". They were engaged in exploring who they were as artists from their own perspectives rather than relying on external models, or what they had been told about what an artist is or does. Deborah stated, "Creativity is what we do to show our true selves." As she noted, the act of creation enabled her to "keep trying new processes, and learning about yourself!" (Piazza, 2017: 382)

To conclude, creative processes can be used in exploring identities as art and creativity have clear benefits for identity development because of the freedom to experiment with identity and ways of creating. When one allows themselves to grasp that freedom to be themselves, the creative process and its explorative & reflective thinking processes give the necessary tools for identity construction and confidence. Based on this expressive, exploratory, and reflective nature, creative work offers many possibilities for perceiving and expressing one's identity in various forms and materials. It is beneficial for identity development as there are possibilities for making meaning of experiences, gaining trust, confidence, and understanding of one's self. Additionally, the importance of understanding one's inspirations and internal motivations is immense to the development of identity because they form the base of the self and our creative work. For me, the creative process and the end artworks formed a bridge to a stronger identity. This process has given me immense which is why I also believe in the benefits of creative work in the identity building process. I gained more knowledge about myself, my goals, and possible paths because of the time to self-reflect and explore. This led to finding ways to express my identity, and gaining confidence and trust in my abilities through uncertainty, joy, and challenges. I have also gained the courage to call myself what I hope to be seen as an artist and believe that I have achieved great my struggle, in the beginning, was what I call myself and the inner conflict between my studies in design and my accelerated interest in fine arts. I can now say that my sense of identity has evolved and deepened as a result of this creative process and I have broken out of the boundaries I had set for myself.
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