DEAR DEER
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- Exploring the possibilities of materials of animal origin from a textile design perspective
DEAR DEER is a project exploring the possibilities of materials of animal origin from a textile design perspective, touching the issues of production and consumption in relation to left over materials and wasted resources. Through manipulation of the materials and creation of sculptural forms, the knowledge in textile design is used to develop alternative methods for working with the animal materials, e.g. intestines, tendons and parchment. With a wish to accentuate the fascinating and extraordinary properties of the materials and challenge the common view on these natural materials as something repellent and repulsive. By exploration of the materials through space dying with acid colours, ironing, wet moulding and laser cutting, the aim is to enhance and bring out the intriguing qualities that lies within these materials. The result is a collection of material samples showing the experimental process within the chosen techniques, further developed in to sculptural work moulded on a dummy or human body with the purpose to emphasize the decorative properties of the material. The importance of the work constitutes by highlighting the increasing consumption, accentuating the fascinating features of animal materials and proposes a way of taking care of materials looked upon as disposals. It challenges how we value what resources we have in our surroundings and how we use them. Or more important – how we are not using them.

KEYWORDS

Textile Design
Textile Art
Textile Techniques
Laser cutting
Wet moulding
Body embellishment
Animal materials
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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD

Throughout the history, the tradition of using and seeing the possibilities in the whole animal, with its material were not only common but also something that appeared as a natural part in our everyday life. For example, with traditional crafting techniques you could use intestines to make raincoats, tendons to make thread, instruments out of horns, drums out of skin and ropes out of horsehair (Vessby 2014; Lindstrand 2014). Today we are distancing us from nature and throwing these fantastic materials away – the meat, leather or fur is what we want from the animal. The handicraft skills are becoming more and more rare, and so is absurdly enough the availability of the animal materials. We are consuming a lot of meat but the industries have to work fast and there can be no more costs than necessary (Vessby 2014).

A creative example of working with alternative animal materials is the German artist Julia Lohmann. Her lamps made out of sheep and cow stomachs are exquisite. The way she lets the material and natural shape speak is fascinating and Julia has really succeeded in creating something beautiful and intriguing of a material that is considered repulsive (Lohmann 2015).

Further, working with parchment and even his own skin, is the Icelandic designer Sruli Recht. In a surgery-performance he removed a bit of his skin, then cleaned, scraped and tanned it like you do with leather or skin from animals (Brand & Teunissen 2014). The outcome was the ring Forget Me Knot. Another work by Sruli is Carapace, a laser cut parchment vest. His way of working with layers in the translucent parchment is stunningly beautiful and inspiring (Recht 2014).

A third example working within the same context is the German designer Victoria Ledig. She has done several work within leather and left over skin, in for example the project Precious Skin and Precious Skin 2.0. The use of leather from unusual parts of the animal, such as the head, and creating forms and object based on the original shape, is very effective and both grotesque and beautiful at the same time (Brand & Teunissen 2014). She has also done a collection with parchment jewellery, focusing on giving the parchment a new meaning (Ledig 2014).

The American artist Cristin Richard creates art with an idea about fashion as sculpture, often driven by existential or political questions. In her work Domesticate Me; she is raising questions about identity, sexuality and social standards. In this project like many others she works with animal intestines as a way to accentuate the ambiguity in the complex issues. The repulsive material she turns into extraordinary beautiful pieces that leaves no one unaffected (Richard 2014).

This project, DEAR DEER touches the issue of consumption, focusing on how to take care of left over or waste materials and to see the resources that exist around us and turn them into designs or artistic work though textile methods.
MOTIVE AND IDEA DISCUSSION

The possibility to work with existing materials that we find in our surroundings, and not to produce new ones is an interesting and inspiring subject. Through an artistic context, by manipulation and creation of sculptural forms, this project will explore the possibilities of animal materials such as parchment, intestines and tendons not in a traditional way, but through developing alternative methods to design with the materials. The skin and intestines are commonly seen or experienced as something repellent, offensive and distasteful, which in this work is put in to contrast with the fascinating, decorative and even stunning properties of the materials.

In different ways, both Julia Lohmann, Sruli Recht, Victoria Ledig and Cristin Richard have brought out the beauty of the parchment, skin, stomachs and intestines. Their work is inspiring and they have all kept the natural essence, shape and colour of the materials. In contrast to this, the project DEAR DEER positions itself in the gap between the natural or traditional way of working with, treat and display materials of animal origin, and the area of textile design. With more experimental methods where the materials are put in a new context and treated with a textile approach, with manipulation and application of textile techniques in pattern, shape and colour, the wish is to add something new to this area and to the material. The goal is to bring out and accentuate the amazing, sometimes hidden natural properties of the materials, because this is what separates them from the fabricated, plastic material. With that said though, the result does not have to remind the viewer of the original material. Instead, the goal is to create a curiosity around the sculptural work that makes the result, and what they are made of.

For the society in general, it is important to create an understanding around the possibilities to use existing materials instead of producing new ones. The project concerns production and consumption – two closely related issues of our modern society, how we value what resources we have in our surroundings and how we use them.

AIM

The project aims to explore animal parchment and intestines as materials in a textile design context and to challenge how what is usually seen as offensive, repellent or grotesque can be turned into something fascinating, intriguing or even decorative. The project will explore the artistic expression of the materials with an ambition to take advantage of the material resources that exists around us.
METHOD AND DEVELOPMENT

DESIGN METHOD AND DESIGN OF EXPERIMENTS

Previous research

From start, this project studied a range of different qualities of leather and parchment with the aim to create sculptural work adapted for the human body. Exploring these materials in an untraditional way, with the demand to approach these materials, as were they textiles, the thought of developing alternative methods for working with the materials arose. A range of different colouring methods was practised, such as warm and cold dye bath with acid colours, space dying with acid and reactive colours and Shibori - a Japanese tie-dye technique. Origami folding techniques, laser cutting, wet moulding and ironing was also part of the experimentation. Through further research, the interests of taking care of additional materials of animal origin started to grow and intestines and tendons were added to the exploration.

Analysis of the experiments determined which samples to develop further. Criteria's of bringing out the material properties and intriguing qualities formed the basis of the selection and it was concluded that the techniques of wet moulding, space dying with acid colours, ironing and laser cutting brought out the most propitious qualities of the materials.

Background research

For inspiration and enhanced understanding of the possibilities in textile manipulation and traditional crafting methods with the materials in question, the project DEAR DEER started out with a research concerning literature and Internet.

Experiments

Based on the selection of methods and materials from the previous research, in this project experiments were made to explore the possibility to work with the materials in a sculptural way and how to enhance the structures, patterns or qualities of the materials in the best way. Further, investigating which technique was suitable to which material, how to combine them and the possibility of sculpturing them.

Sculptural work

Out of the experiments, a selection of materials and techniques was made, followed by creation of sculptural work on dummy in scale 1:1. The shape and properties of the material led the process focusing on how to develop and create the shapes.
Method

The design of experiments was following a practice led design research method, where the research constitutes of hands-on-design that goes beyond theory, as Koskinen describes in Design Research Through Practice (2011). The materials were taken out of their original context and were brought into an area controlled by the designer and therefore, not only the designer’s intuition, knowledge and skills, but also the designer’s interaction with the materials, became an important part of the development of the experiments and prototypes.

DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN RATIONALE

Material

From start, this project grew around the interest for a specific group of material, more exactly – materials of animal origin. These materials were chosen due to the long tradition of working with the materials within textile areas together with their textile expression in tactility and qualities such as ability to colour and form or shape by hand. The three chosen materials – parchment, intestines and tendons, are meant to complement each other with its different qualities.

The selected parchments came in three different qualities. A thicker one from calf or cattle (fig. 1), a thin, amber and transparent from reindeer (fig. 2), and the last one also from reindeer but this time light yellow or white, opaque (fig. 3). The conclusion made from this together with observations of other raw hides is that not only does the kind of animal or their individual marking decide the outcome of the parchment, but so does the treatment and process in making. Not only the appearance of the parchment is decided by this, but also the qualities of the material. These were explored and seen as an advantage in this project.

The intestines came fresh, although preserved in common salt (fig. 4). They were rinsed in water, more or less, and then dried in different states and shapes (fig. 5). Rinsing the intestines very careful, or even let them lay in water for some time before drying, would make the result thin, transparent and delicate (fig. 6). Retaining some of the salt through a lighter rinsing created a more solid, white intestine covered with a pattern of salt crystals (fig. 7). The second option created a stronger expression and a material that would be easier to work with and handle.

The tendons were delivered raw from the slaughterhouse, and when cleaned they were dried (fig. 8), turning into amber adamant pieces (fig.9). According to found sources, it would be possible to process the dry tendon to be able to eliminate thread-like thin strings that could be spun into threads (Buckskin 2007). These big, solid tendons turned out to be impossible to process, but when boiled in hot water the threads could be removed (fig. 10). The threads came out stiff and fragile when dried again, therefore this technique was ruled out. Instead, this led to the idea of heating the tendon up by boiling it and then cut, shape or mould it in this soft state (fig. 11).
**Technique**

Looking at the chosen materials as finished fabrics, a kind of non-woven textiles, the techniques of weaving or knitting were ruled out. Instead, the focus was laid on ways of manipulating the materials with a textile approach or perspective, using the techniques determined in the previous research. Important was to not let the technique take over the material – the material is the essential. Instead, the techniques were aimed to accentuate the qualities of the material.

Ironing, heating or burning the parchment showed to be a very effective way of manipulating or shape the material that when exposed to heat turned in to three-dimensional structures. The heat exposed and enhanced the structure of an organic grid hidden in the material. It brought out the most unexpected shapes, patterns and structures. Different parchment showed to react differently on heat, were a thicker one did not respond to ironing but instead would come alive and expand or purse when held over fire (fig. 12). The thinner ones reacted well to ironing although very differently. The white, opaque one curled up creating small and large holes or elevations (fig. 13), where the brown, transparent parchment remained flat but pursed in a net-like pattern (fig. 14).

The technique of laser cutting was examined on parchment in several ways with more or less, large or small cutting patterns. The goal was to create or enhance three-dimensional shapes, structures and texture from simple cuts (fig. 15-16) when wet moulding it after cutting. Small cuts created interesting surface textures to the parchment and resulted in an expression that enhanced the quality of the material. Important in this aspect though, was to keep part of the material untouched. This to create a contrast between the cut and uncut areas, which made the expression stronger (fig. 17). The use of larger cuts, resulted in the material turning in to a constructed structure which came out rather flat and took away much of the quality of the material. Cutting the parchment in long, thin areas also turned the material and shape in to insipid and flat patterns and forms lacking the significant sense of the material (fig. 18). An important question emerged from this experience: How much can you cut before you destroy the expression of the material?

Wet moulding came to be a central technique concerning this project. Without adding water, the materials are solid and only when wet (or warm in case of the tendons), they get soft and are then able to shape and sculpture with. Therefore, after laser cutting, ironing, burning etc. all samples will be wet moulded. It is also through this technique the three-dimensional structures of the laser cutting will appear. Wet mouldings were also practiced on the original or ironed material with manipulating techniques such as folding, pleating or shaping against or though an existing form (fig. 19-22). When shaped in wet condition and then dried, the materials will remain in that form.
**Colour**

An important criteria when adding colour, is the interaction between the material and the colour. The colours presence should only be about enhancing the material or shape. Since the material being the central part with the goal to accentuate the fascinating existing qualities, it is important to keep and emphasise the natural essence of the material and not to cover or disfigure it.

The choice of colour tone was based on a natural and earthy colour scheme, and combined with the materials used either to enhance and deepen the existing colour of the material or to create a contrast that could contribute to an interesting meeting between the natural and the artificial (fig. 23-24).

To keep the essence of the material and to emphasize the expression and shapes, experiments showed it was preferable to apply colour after shaping. Colourings before shaping or manipulating would cover the piece of material, take away the quality and make it look flat (fig. 25).

Acid colour for textile protein fibres attached well to the animal materials and the colour reproduction turned out great. The fluid colour was dripped or poured over the already shaped form and ran down following the structures and patterns of the material (fig. 26).

**Sculptural work**

The sculptural work could be defined as a combination of the forced and natural aesthetics where the material itself was in lead for the process and moulding of the forms. The forced aesthetics means shape, pattern, texture and colour created by hand or with tools, whereas the natural aesthetics means the original state of the material.

After analysis of the experimental samples, these criteria’s were considered when choosing which samples to develop further in to the sculptures. The contrast between the forced aesthetics (fig. 27) and natural shapes (fig. 28) where combined to create intriguing meetings, which would underline each other and make both expressions stronger.

Finally, all samples were wet moulded and shaped either directly on a dummy (fig. 29), or in smaller parts that would be mounted together to a bigger piece in relation to the body (fig. 30-31).
RESULT

This work is an investigating and experimental project concerning materials of animal origin such as parchment, tendons and intestines put in a textile design context and processed by textile methods. The result is not only a discovery of new methods, but a collection of material samples together with a range of sculptural work, showing the experimental process within the techniques of space dying, ironing, burning, wet moulding and laser cutting. The sculptural objects has been moulded, shaped or built on a dummy or human body. The body chosen for being a form that is easily recognized and related to, and also to emphasize the decorative properties of the material and sculptural work. The sculptures could be described as an extension of the samples from which a selection was made based on the criteria's of combining natural and forced aesthetics, which could be developed in to the sculptures. The samples and sculptures display a wide range of techniques and qualities focusing on bringing out the fascinating, intriguing and even decorative qualities of the materials. The found or enhanced properties are challenging the common view of the material as something repellent, often considered as disposals.

The functionality and use of the sculptures has not been taken under consideration, but instead focus was put on the visual part and how to enhance the qualities of the materials. The exploration of how to use the materials has been on an artistic level and not to be concerned with commercialisation of the result. It has not been included to investigate any further function or area of application of the outcome of the material exploration, and not consideration of any type of industrial or big scale production due to this being a craft based project.
SCULPTURE 1

Material: Calf parchment
Technique: Laser cutting, Cutting by hand, Heating, Wet moulding
Size: 57 x 61 x 37 cm

SCULPTURE 2

Material: Intestines from cattle
Technique: Wet moulding
Size: 19 x 98 x 17 cm
SCULPTURE 3

Material: Reindeer parchment

Technique: Cutting by hand, Ironing, Wet moulding, Space dying with acid colour

Size: 51 x 46 x 26 cm

SCULPTURE 4

Material: Tendons from cattle

Technique: Wet moulding, Space dying with acid colour

Size: 31 x 28 x 7 cm
SCULPTURE 5

Material: Reindeer parchment
Technique: Cutting by hand, Ironing, Wet moulding, Space dying with acid colour
Size: 35 x 56 x 34 cm

SCULPTURE 6

Material: Intestines from cattle
Technique: Wet moulding
Size: 47 x 63 x 35 cm
SCULPTURE 7

Material: Intestines from cattle

Technique: Wet moulding

Size: 33 x 57 x 21 cm

SCULPTURE 8

Material: Calf parchment

Technique: Laser cutting, Wet moulding, Space dyeing with acid colour

Size: 13 x 15 x 9 cm
SCULPTURE 9

Material: Tendons from cattle
Technique: Wet moulding
Size: 21 x 21 x 5 cm

SAMPLE COLLECTION

Material: Calf parchment, Reindeer parchment, Intestines from cattle, Tendons from cattle

Technique: Laser cutting, Cutting by hand, Ironing, Heating, Wet moulding, Space dying with acid colour

Size: ≈ 10 x 10 cm / piece
PRESENTATION

The experimental work and combination between textile design and the traditional way of taking care of the materials, merge together in an expressive, modern take of the handicraft and natural materials. The strong expression of the materials themselves, accentuated with a more abstract take in pattern, shape and colour adds something powerful and new to this area with a hope to create curiousness and in a way, serve as an eye opener for how we live, consume and waste materials.

The body was chosen as a familiar form related to consumption through the modern humans constant need to embellish themselves with new clothes and jewellery. It was chosen as a tool or model to shape the materials on, and the sculptures are meant to stand for themselves, not relying on any kind of body. Although, the sculptural work is strong in its own expression, displaying it on a body adds to the work becoming even more distinct and impressive. The body takes the materials out of its ordinary context, make them personal and they are therefore allowed to be observed from a new and different angle. As well as they work together in the collection, each work is strong enough to stand for themselves. The general idea behind each sculpture is more or less the same; based on the criteria’s of letting the material be the guide, to decide the direction of both shape and colour, but always in combination with the forced aesthetics created by the touch of hand or tools.

Contextualizing this work, the material, samples and the sculptures – they all possesses a textile expression in texture, with both strong visual and tactile presence. Together with the applied textile techniques and not least the body, it could be put in a textile design context. Textile is a material we have close to our bodies, and replacing this with a material that in several ways carries the same qualities, enables us to interpret and approve to this fact. Other contexts that this work could be placed into, is for example exclusive jewellery, sustainability or the area of animal material crafts.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

To reconnect to previous works mentioned, made by Julia Lohmann, Sruli Recht, Victoria Ledig and Cristin Richard, the coherent theme seems to be a more or less pronounced political agenda with a wish to take care, highlight and emphasize the fascinating properties of animal materials. By keeping and accentuating the natural essence in shape and colour, and treat the materials in somewhat traditional ways, their work is separated from DEAR DEER. This project is about exploring the material with techniques developed for another area, and with a textile reference or approach, and not with a political agenda as focal point.
It could be discussed whether this project would be considered as design, art or craft. But what are the actual differences? Does the term design mean to create something new, to solve a problem? Is art to experiment and explore with an unknown result? Is craft to follow directions, to make something objective created by your hands? Or could it be the same thing? Could it be connected?
This work may actually incorporate all three areas. By exploring a new material with the skills and knowledge from another area or field problems on how to approach the materials in a new way, were solved. The material led the creating of shapes with an unknown and experimental result where every form was created by hand. Together, this contributed to curiousness and freedom in the making, not being aware or held back by the traditionally or historically defined
methods of the handicraft, concerning both the textile techniques and the area of working with animal materials.

Due to this being a project with a limited amount of time, it was never an option to take care of the “original” and untreated materials from the animal, although this would be preferable under other circumstances. Instead, this work became a tool for highlighting the issue of consumption and production and the decorative properties of the chosen materials working with ready-made parchment and cleaned and preserved intestines. The exception being the strings, a part of the animal that is no longer taken care of, which had to be cleaned and dried.

By choosing to work with ready-made or prepared materials, the conditions were set from start, which led the work to proceed relating to this limitations. This is a general complication when taking care of existing resources, in this case looked upon as a challenge that contributed to the work. Important was to let the material be the central part and also to lead the process in making of the sculptures, something that was emphasized according to its original shape. The shape became both a key to see and discover the possibilities in the sculptural work leading to new ideas, and a hinder in the search for forms and structures.

Within textile design, the surface is of much importance, a fact that together with shape is as important in this project concerning these materials. The materials of animal origin treated as non-woven fabrics, reacted well to the chosen textile techniques but in some cases the method needed to be adapted for the material. Because of this, by choosing a material that is not considered textile and treat it with a textile approach, and therefore being forced to adjust the textile techniques and methods, it has led to the development of new and more experimental methods that will help widen the textile area. This work also contributes and encourages a new view of the textile area, by widening our view on what we consider as textiles. Interesting would be to move these new and developed methods back into the textile field and apply them here – how much would the outcome difference from the use of the original technique? It also opens up to a more free thinking when approaching textiles, or any kind of material for that matter, due to the discovered possibility of smoothing out the boundaries or build bridges between different areas of design and craft by application of methods adapted for another area.

The methods selected in this project worked well to attain the aim, and brought out intriguing qualities but could also be developed by using other methods. The similarity in the textile material and the chosen materials of animal origin, surely contributed to the success in the application of the techniques. A development could be to choose methods adapted for a contrasting area, for example working with metal or wood.

Further, taking care of the raw, original animal material could expand this work. What would the result be, if approaching these materials with the aim to preserve or take care of the material, but without the knowledge of the traditional way of doing it?

The project DEAR DEER touches the issue of production and consumption by bringing out and accentuate the extraordinary properties of materials of animal origin and highlighting the possibility of taking care of the resources that exists around us. By showing the expressive and decorative qualities of a group of materials commonly described as repulsive and distasteful, not assigned any higher value than waste – the issue of consumption and production does in this project indicate the possibility and the profit of taking care of these resources. If we are going to continue to consume meat the way we do, dress up in fur or use leather in our shoes, bags, furniture etc., we need to take care of all the great so called by-products or waste-products that comes with it.

By moving the materials into a new context, in this case the textile design context, it is possible to see and be stunned by the features and qualities of the material, not depending on the origin of the material. This new context is hopefully what will help change the common view on these materials as something repellent and repulsive, and what will open for the chance of a new interpretation where the fascinating, intriguing or even decorative properties is put foremost.
This project will with certainty contribute to indignation and resentment due to the question of our right to kill animals, but hopefully it will also develop new thoughts and conceptions concerning the subject.

The modern society, the modern human being, has distanced itself from nature. Only a generation back, it was a natural part to take care of everything the nature offered, and the human situated her- or himself in the nature. In contrast to this, today we disaffiliate from nature. The fact that the meat in the counter of the store has once been alive, that the milk in the square, paper boxes comes from a cow, or that the hens lay egg – is no longer natural or evident. This distance might be what makes the antipathy and incomprehension towards this subject. Important to enhance is that there exists plenty opinions and views concerning this topic, in which this work does not take any stand or side. Instead, the purpose is to highlight the problem of consumption and production in the dissipation of natural resources, by taking care of materials considered as disposals and to accentuate the value of them. This work addresses the subject from a historical perspective, when and how people were more aware and concerned about taking care of our surrounding resources, when nothing would be allowed as waste and the term dissipation were equivalent with exceptionable. We need to revalue the surrounding resources and how we use them. Or more important – how we are not using them.
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