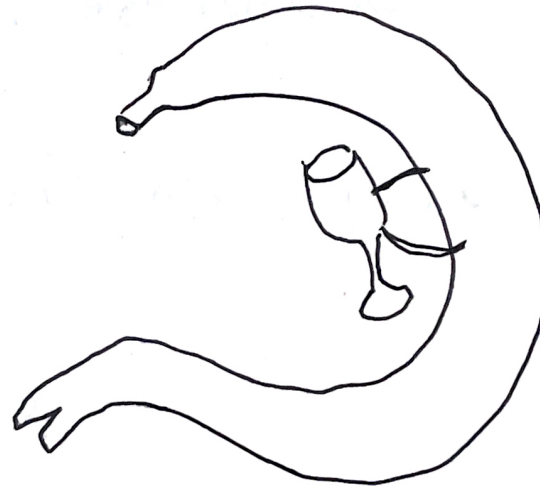


CARE - KER

Katla Rúnarsdóttir

Part A
Professor: Jessica Hemmings

Programme: MFA in Craft (Ceramics), 120 credits
Course: KHM20 Master's Degree Project in Craft 2,
30 credits
Level: Second Cycle
Spring Year 2024



The presence of a shrimp has followed me throughout my practice. I have never really understood why. I perceive shrimp to be exposed and vulnerable from their dull colour and slimy texture and, at first, I thought the relation to them was this vulnerability. However, recently I found out that all my grandparents, who come from the small fishing village Ísafjörður in Iceland, all worked in the shrimp industry. This new familial connection reignited my fascination for shrimp. It is not only about their aesthetics, but it has also become a symbol of my heritage and identity. After discussing shrimp with my grandfather, I have come to the conclusion that the shrimp could be described as our godmother. The title CARE-KER refers to the care that is the core of this project. The Icelandic word “ker” means vessel and is pronounced the same way as care.

I will outline my project, detailing the creative process across three sections. The first one delves into how food evolved into a symbol of care in my perspective. The second section explores the significance of creating my sculptures with distinct identities and how that enriches the overall work. The third and final section focuses on the making of an installation, addressing the key elements essential to the work.

- How do I materialise care for meals through my vessels?



My first shrimp related artwork, titled:
Am I a Shrimp? 2017

Making Dinner



A sketch of a family gathering, 2024

Throughout my life mind has always been very occupied with food in every sense. From consumption and preparation to meticulous planning and nostalgic reflection on past meals. All my most valuable memories happened at a dining table. As Laila Gohar writes in this beautiful paragraph, the ritual of sharing a meal by the dining table holds a lot of meaning to families and communities. “No object or piece of furniture has been as meaningful to family and community as the dining table, where simple acts of hospitality— laying out a tablecloth, opening a bottle of wine, cutting a cake — become rituals. Playfully enlivening tradition with humour and surrealism.” (Gohar, 2020) Gohar is an interdisciplinary artist working with food and playfulness, combining the two with the meaning they play in our everyday lives. The rituals of sharing meals with your loved ones are an important aspect of my work. My preoccupation with food finds its roots in my family where we all seem to have the same mindset. Constantly wondering what we should eat next. Every family dinner we worry there is not enough food, while there always is. My grandfather is a paragon of care and precision, he makes it with so much love its almost visible. He knows every family member’s favourite dish and crafts them tailored to individual tastes while adapting them to the seasonal availability of ingredients. For instance, when the fisherman hauls in a fresh catch of shrimp, my grandmother gets her favourite meal, the Shrimp Cocktail. If there isn't any fresh fish in town my uncle gets his favourite comfort dish, a hearty chicken stew.

When I visualise my family dinner it reminds me of a famous painting by the American artist Normann Rockwell titled *Freedom from Want* (1943). Aside from how political this painting is for that time I feel that it depicts a family dinner quite well. There is a family gathered around a meal, it exudes warmth and togetherness in a festive and quite chaotic atmosphere. I feel that Rockwell succeeded to catch this essence of familial care through the act of eating together. (Megan Smith, 2019)

I aim to do this in my own way by focusing on my own heritage and traditions. I am born and raised in Iceland where the food culture is quite poor because of harsh weather conditions. It was mainly based on fish, lamb, root vegetables and dairy products. Of course, it has changed with time but when looking back to my grandparents' diets, I would say it looked quite sad and tasteless. Even with the lack of quality and variety Icelanders still knew how to enjoy a meal. It is precious how eating can create valuable gatherings no matter how unremarkable it is. The shrimp is very nostalgic to me, the summers I stayed in my grandparent's fjord Ísafjörður we ate a lot of shrimp. I remember sitting in the sun on their terrace peeling freshly caught shrimp, putting it on a toast with some mayonnaise hearing my grandmother say “mmmmh” devouring each bite. The saying “You are what you eat” Valdemarsdóttir suggest it could also be “You are what you have eaten” (Valdemarsdóttir, 2010) That sentence is visually humorous to me and relates to this project where I am sculpting my family into vessels that remind of different foods.



A classic dish served at a celebration or a funeral in Iceland. Called the *Fish-jello* or *Fiskigel*

Making Characters

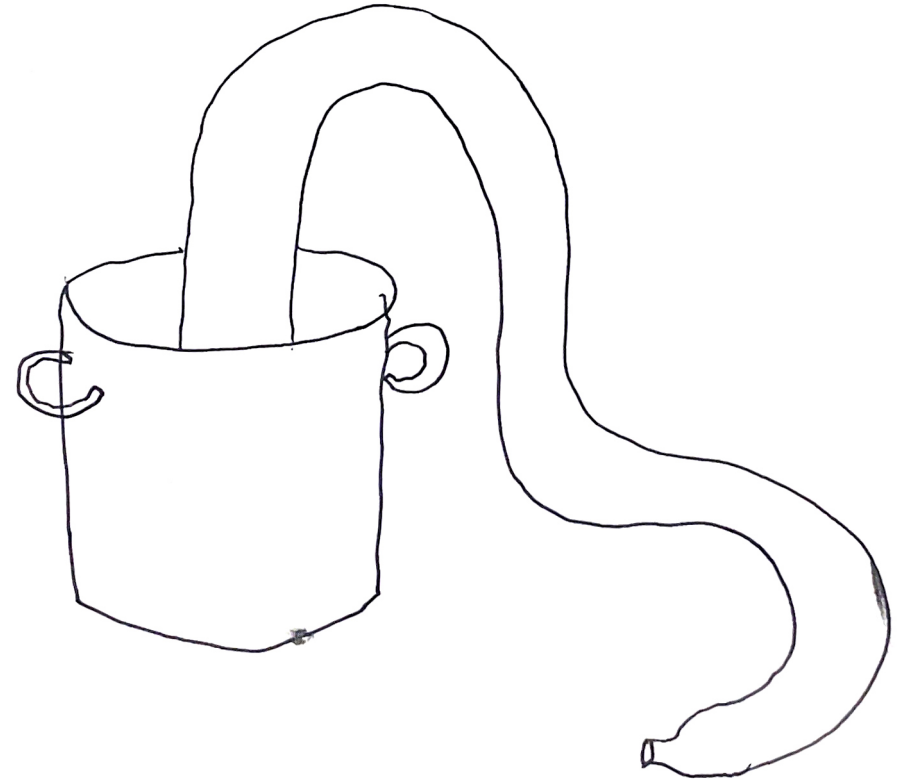


*The vase that ate too many olives,
2023*

Crafting characters comes naturally to me, when growing up I had a very fruitful imagination. I recall walking to and from kindergarten, warmly acknowledging each lamppost with either a hug or a wave. Starting my artistic practice, I recognise a persistent inclination to breathe life into every object I make. When creating characters in clay I always sculpt them as vessels, for me the vessel represents a body. They can breathe and contain all kinds of things, they keep feelings, memories and water.

Stories about families and traditions often inspire me to create, both positive and the more difficult ones. I recently read a novel called *Lungu* (Garcia, 2022), it influenced me to make deeper narrative around my sculptures. One storyline within it depicted a young man who consumed an excessive number of raw olives to evade wartime duty. This peculiar habit transcended generations, passing from father to son, and onward. This narrative inspired me to make a vessel that looked like it had eaten so many olives that it was about to explode. This intrigued me to think if I can pay tribute to my own family through my artistic creations. In this project I am sculpting different foods while connecting them to my family members. I make a list of foods I find relevant for my family, for example potatoes, shrimp and cucumbers. From there I start sculpting with my family members in mind, evoking the atmosphere of the dinner setting. The potato for example is a female, she reminds me of my mother and her two sisters. To capture the essence of all of them, I will dress the potato in a knitted sweater which is something the female members of my family would all wear.

I have admired the work *One* by the German artist Tobias Rehberger for years. In this work he portrayed 14 of his friends by making a vase from each of their characteristics and aesthetics. When Rehberger exhibited the work, he asked those friends to send their favourite flowers to the gallery without them knowing what for. (Rehberger, & Matzner, F, 2001) I think Rehberger portrayed his friends beautifully in that way, making the vessel, thinking about the friend and exhibiting it with the subjects' favourite flowers. When creating characters and depicting family members in clay I aim to use the same care and respect Rehberger did, while adding a dash of humour to it. When deciding what each sculpture should look like I think about the characteristics I feel the sculpture needs, for example my grandfather is tall and slim and loves cooking, therefore the shape will be long sausage-like figure stepping out of a pot. I only sculpt characters that are lovable to myself in some way. If I want to hug them at the end of the process I have succeeded. What can make a sculpture huggable in my opinion is smooth texture, a kissable lip, soft curves, vibrant colours or when it reminds me of a specific person.



A sketch of my grandpa stepping
out of a pot, 2023

Making Space



A video still from Dana Sherwood's work *Feral Cakes*, 2017

How can I create a world that resonates both with my own sensibilities and those of the viewer? I have thought a lot about how to orchestrate a family dinner in an exhibition. Using sound could awake curiosity among viewers similar to Cosima Von Bonin's work *Who's Exploiting Who in the Deep Sea?* Her installation is full of textile figures that resemble animals from the sea. They are placed in a human setting, a shark sitting by a desk and a few scallops in a swing and so on. Bonin also implements sound to a few of the works with the help of a musician. They place a couple of speakers around the room, some with white-noise and others with crashing waves to give the viewer the feel of the environment we are placed in. (Farago, 2016) Using furniture to humanise Bonin's sculptures makes them come alive while she also connects her objects to the sea by having ocean sounds. For my work to become alive, I have integrated sound. During the sculpting process, I deliberately included a cavity at the bottom of each sculpture, providing the opportunity to embed a speaker within them. The sounds will vary from creature to creature. The potato will occasionally laugh, the cucumber might burp, and the shrimp would boss them around.

Artist Dana Sherwood made a work called *Feral Cakes* (2017) where she set a dining table out for her friends in the forest. She was setting out fruits and vegetables, meats and cakes and videotaped it to see who came to dinner. The menu changed after figuring out the animals' preferences. (Kinchin-Smith, 2019) The writer Kinchin-Smith explains:

In *Feral Cakes*, for instance, the banquets are presented on a children's dining table, complete with a tablecloth, teacups, and chairs. With raccoons and housecats sharing at the same table, the imagery that the work facilitates is reminiscent of a mad tea party in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. (Kinchin-Smith, 2019)

While Sherwood incorporates living animals into her artwork, my approach involves crafting my own dinner guests in shapes of food with a comparable setup.

Contemplating an artwork that masterfully embodies both humour and vitality brings to mind my favourite work by artist David Shrigley *DO NOT TOUCH THE WORMS*. This substantial installation features oversized pink worms in a dynamic cycle. They inflate gradually to come to life and then slowly deflate. The worms' imposing scale gives them a significant presence while their pink colours make them simultaneously charming (Shrigley, 2020). By creating my sculptures on a life-size scale, I am hoping it could make them more effective and relatable. The oddness of walking amongst giant worms is humorous to me. Imagining walking into an installation of strange foods wearing human clothing and drinking wine excites me. It raises questions about who they are and where they come from similar to Shrigley's worms.



An image from David Shrigley
exhibition titled: *DO NOT TOUCH
THE WORMS*, 2020



A sketch of a potential installation, 2024

Care-Ker is a personal project where I explore the newfound significance of shrimp in my family by paying homage to personal narratives. I have used three sections to focus on different aspects of my creative process. The first section delves into the symbolism of food as a vessel for care and where my fascination with shrimp comes from. In the second one I consider the importance of giving my sculptures identities and how the characters are created. In the final section I seek inspiration from other artist on how to make an installation, for example Cosima Von Bonin work and how she both mixes materials and sound to create a space. David Shrigley and his Life-sized humorous sculptures resembling worms. With this project, that will finally become an artwork I want to invite viewers into a world that sparks joy and curiosity about the sculptures and who they are, with exciting colours, familiar sounds and strange shapes. I aim to celebrate the ritual of a family dinner by seeking inspiration into my own ordinary family and the humour that comes from our everyday.

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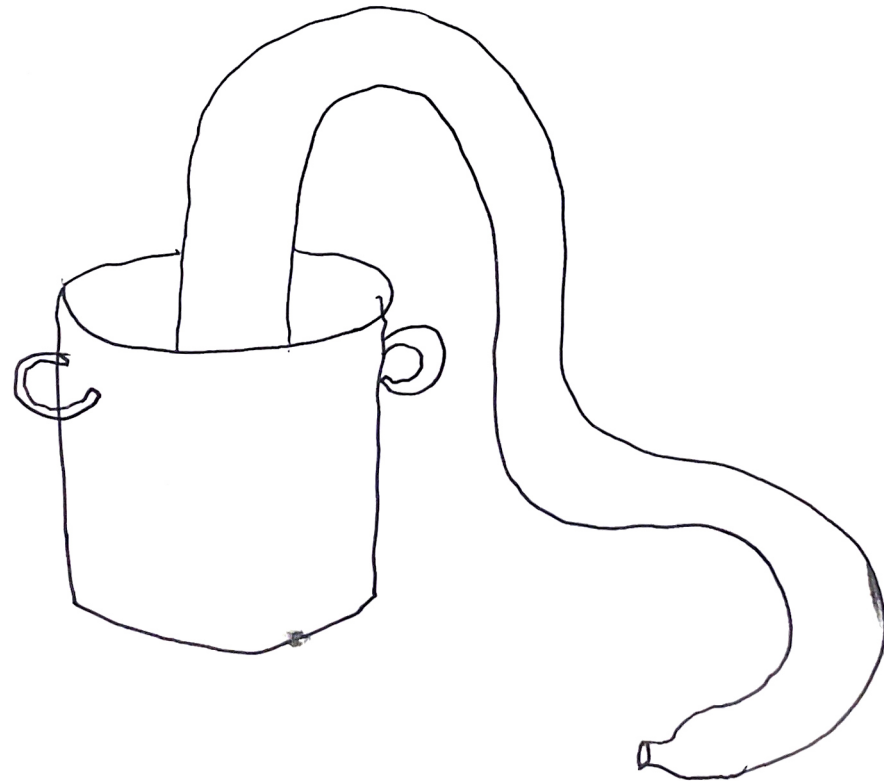
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CARE - KER

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Part B
Professor: Magnus Haglund

Programme: MFA in Craft (Ceramics), 120 credits
Course: KHMx20 Master's Degree Project in
Craft 2, 30 credits
Level: Second Cycle
Spring Year 2024



I have this special bond to a place called *Seljaland*, it is a beautiful red house up on a hill in a village in Iceland called *Ísafjörður*. It is a house my grandparents bought in the 90s and ever since, it has hosted the best and the most memorable gatherings. I seek endless inspiration both from my grandparents and the parties they host.





My exam work consists of seven ceramic sculptures, each representing a different family member. My grandfather the Sausage, he runs around the table, gets stuck inside a casserole pot, wearing his messy apron. Grandmother is the Cucumber, laying on the table with a glass of wine in her hand. The Potato, my mother, sitting patiently at the table taking care of everyone's needs, wearing her favourite blue cardigan. The Shrimp represents all three sons in laws. Just whistling waiting for the food to be served, wearing horrible smelly wool socks. The other three sculptures sitting at the table are smaller and represent us grandchildren, two smaller sausages and one olive. The table is decorated with old spotty doilies laying on a yellow tablecloth. On the table are glasses, they have had so much fun throughout the years that they are starting to deform and melt.

I think its best if I make a made-up memory that could very easily have happened and explains how an evening at their house can transpire.

I walk slowly from the summerhouse to go to my grandparent's dinner. I breathe in the cold air, the smell of the ocean and old grass. There is an angry bird swinging above me wanting me to leave, it's his area. The road is so uneven I need to watch my step, I don't want to trip. Sometimes I look for the smallest almost evaporated puddles and poke the soil. It's so satisfying to hear the squiggly sound when rubbing my dirty fingers together. When I have had enough and start getting annoyed with the bird, I stroke my muddy fingers into the yellow grass and walk to the lake to rinse them. I stand below the hill to my grandparents house. I see that guest are already there, three cars already parked dangerously in the hill and grandpa is putting the flag up on the flagpole. "HALLO!" he shouts to me and waves with a smile. I can see that underneath his very old used up *Lopapeysa* he is wearing his apron, in just as bad of a condition as the *Lopapeysa* sweater. I wave and try to keep up the pace while climbing up the hill. Their house has a burgundy red colour, quite weathered in some places, I used to chirp off the red flakes from the galvanised iron and be told to stop immediately. I still do it sometimes; it's so satisfying to peel off the red paint and see the cold silver metal hiding underneath.





I can see and hear grandma through the window, her laugh can break through any wall. I look up at the mountains, the snow is slowly retreating and spring is hopefully on its way. I step into the sunroom, which is also the entrance, guests have already spread their outer layers on the sofas and shoes are everywhere. The windows are like little cubicles; each decorated with objects my grandparents have gotten from different vacations. Some wooden carved figures, photo of them posing with some guy wearing a Hawaiian shirt, little golden container and many more, all covered in sticky dust and dead flies. I cleaned these windows, each and every one, about ten years ago. I have never seen so many corpses in my whole life. Each little window was spotted in yellow fly feces. These poor windows haven't been cleaned since, I assume. The entrance is my favourite in this house, aside from all the corpses. It's filled with stories, both memories from spending time there and my grandparents memories of past travels. I hear guests are out on the porch, I walk through the garage to greet them. The garage is my grandpa's sanctuary, it stores all his hobbies and all the old bits and pieces they both have hoarded over the years. There is an ancient oven turned on, inside the potatoes are roasting. We call them "forgotten potatoes", the longer you forget them in the oven the better they become. There is his freezer stuffed with fish and ice cream, his refrigerator filled with beers, cheap wine bottles and opened cans of Pepsi max, a sauna built in the 80s and even a solarium that hasn't been used for decades. It is also where he stores his old and new skis, his tools and wood scraps. I smell the barbecue outside; I suspect they are grilling lamb.

Every dinner party starts with a family split, the men drink beer and barbecue while the women stay inside and prepare everything else while taking care of the kids. I chat for a little bit with the grillers and then decide to go in and help to prepare. Grandpa shouts at me to bring a tray for the lamb, I shout "Sure!" and walk inside. It is chaotic, children are running around laughing and grandma giving orders while sitting in her chair with a glass of wine scrolling through her Facebook newsfeed. My mother, her sisters and my sister are either running around after the kids or stirring a pot while cutting vegetables and melting chocolate in the microwave. As soon as grandma sees me, she tells me to go to the garage and get more chairs and then set the table. I start picking up chairs and seeing grandpa checking on the forgotten potatoes I remember the tray. I run to get the tray and almost walk over a kid doing a puzzle in the doorway. Kid forgives me but grandma asks about why I'm not carrying any chairs. "I just forgot that grandpa needs a tray, then I will get chairs, sorry sorry." I find a tray and I see my nephew is sitting in a corner eating crisps that he found in someone's bag. He offers me one and I can't refuse a crisp from a two-year-old. I place the tray on the floor. We munch together on the salty crisps, he won't let me leave, he keeps feeding me and I keep forgetting my tasks.





My niece walks up to us and grabs a crisp while making hand gestures that I should go and finish my tasks. I walk to the kitchen, the coffee pot is still warm, the radio is mumbling, and the floor is sticky. I need to try to find fourteen matching plates with no luck, it will be a mix and match, same goes for the wine glasses. My grandma has bought napkins in the supermarket, they are paper white with a yellow realistic chicken in the middle and around it are colourful flying easter eggs. I lay one on every plate and grandma smiles at me and says, "don't you like these beautiful napkins I picked?" I nod and smile while wishing silently I had been in charge of picking napkins. I suddenly remember about the chairs in the garage but instead of getting them myself I ask my uncles that are both sitting in the sofa reading an ancient Donald Duck comic books to go get them so I can finish setting the table. They look up from their comics and say in a deep voice "yes" at the exact same time. They don't seem very happy about getting a task. When they come back with one chair each, I see how useless it is to ask for help. My grandpa comes in shouting "WHERE IS MY TRAY?!" I think oh no, I left it on the floor in the entrance, so I hurry up to get it. I hand it to my annoyed grandpa and apologies for forgetting. He smiles and orders me to go give the grillers some beers. I roll my eyes and walk away; they can get their own beers. Instead, I fill up my grandmothers glass with a fresh bottle of white wine and sit next to her in the sofa. I let her read for me her Facebook newsfeed and wait until grandfather shouts "DINNER!".