

# From Far to Close (and Back). Material Resistance and Changing Perspectives in Visual Art Practice

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## Abstract

I study the experience of three-dimensional visual art practice through the methodology of artistic research. From my perspective, art practice involves the body, materiality and continuous movement. This I demonstrate via empirical research data, and I portray my art-making process through a narrative framework. In addition, I analyze my artistic processes through a multidisciplinary theoretical analysis, which combines the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the perspectives of new materialism and localization in feminist thinking. In my art-making experience, the chiasmatic relationship between the artist and the work of art reveals the resistance of material making, which opens the possibility for the artist to change working perspectives. My objective is to demonstrate the variation of complementary perspectives in art practice and research. At the same time, my article serves as an example of how the method of artistic research challenges research paradigms, their presentation, writing and reporting.

**KEYWORDS:** three-dimensional visual art practice, embodiment, movement, chiasm, new materialism, localization

## The first movements

I handle three-dimensional visual art practice from the point of view of embodiment and the experiential. I refer to the concept of three-dimensional visual art practice in a broad sense, including, for example, sculpture, installation and environmental art (Krauss, 1979/1986; Ellegood, 2009, p. 6-7, 9-10; Mäkikoskela, 2015, p. 32-35, 72-76). Three-dimensional art practice is not a well-established concept in the field of visual arts and research. In Finland, it is commonly referred to as sculpture (Tihinen, 2010). My research, however, does not deal with this technique alone. Also, to isolate sculpture from installation art (e. g. Bishop, 2005, p. 6, 10-

11) is not appropriate here. Instead, the three-dimensional – material and spatial – making in visual arts is essential in my research.

I define experience as perception through the senses, in relation to the outside world of the perceiver. I apply this concept to all internal and external sensations and experiences. According to the phenomenological research carried out in research in the arts, experience opens up a single phenomenon within a specific time and place to an individual whose experience is at stake (Varto, 2008, p. 60-61). Experience is never universal, it is unique and changing (Varto, 2012). In western philosophy, experience is generally applied towards obtaining information about reality. This information makes an essential contribution, distinct from previous knowledge (Hetemäki, 1999, p. 110). Experience is primarily understood as one way of gathering information, but not as a definitive level of knowledge. Experience can also be understood as meeting a shared reality and testing one's own perceptions in relation to it (Backman, 2017). In this case, individual and singular experience takes place within the communal context: experiencing is the dialogue between individual prejudices and shared reality.

I define embodiment as the operational aspect of a visual artist, in which the physical and material nature of making is emphasized. From the artist's point of view, three-dimensional visual art is, in addition to the visual, tangible and tactile-based, since the form is revealed through touch. While pursuing three-dimensional artworks, I move both the working materials and my own body. I am a material and spatial shape in the space surrounding me, but there is also material and space inside my shape bordered by my skin. When I work, I experience as a three-dimensional form in a three-dimensional space – the body (see also Mäkikoskela, 2015, p. 82-83). I confront my working material and an evolving work of art as a sensory body. My body's motion gains its significance by perceiving sensory experience from within my environment.

In recent years, the research of visual arts has focused not only on the interaction between the work of art and the viewer but also on experiencing the work of art as a material event (Kontturi, 2014, p. 120-123). A number of feminist researchers have highlighted the materiality of body (Braidotti, 1994; Grosz, 1994). In doing so, they have influenced the material turn of feminist research. These researchers have also introduced a new way of viewing the process of visual art practice (Fer, 2009; Kontturi, 2012). Additionally, feminist theory and literature have a strong tradition relating to the author-researcher position (e. g. Cixous, 1969). For example, Adrienne Rich (1984/2003) has highlighted how her work as a writer has been specifically influenced by her experience in the specific time and place. This has followed the feminist

theory of locating the subject, which means taking account of the author, and her time and place of action (Haraway, 1991).

## The presentation of the method

Artists and their works have been studied in abundance, in the disciplines of art history and aesthetics, but there is less research on the experience of art-making (see more Mäkikoskela & Kangasniemi, 2016, p. 42-43). Making a work of art is a different experience than following another person's art-making process through seeing, hearing or reading. I draw from my workmanship and expertise as a visual artist when studying the experience of art-making. By making art, I have access to the core experience of art practice, and I can describe and write about my experience. In visual arts, the method of artistic research has enabled an academic examination of art practice from the point of view of an artist-researcher (Siukonen, 2002).

By employing artistic research methods, I produce the research material and analyze it in the same process of art-making. I report my research by exhibiting the research material and writing about the research process. Thus, artistic research includes both the practical and theoretical review (see also Barrett & Bolt, 2007; Slager, 2012). In this article, I combine the artist's experiential knowledge and a theoretical review. By doing so, I aim to identify broader meanings around the phenomenon of three-dimensional visual art practice. By making art and studying my activity, I strive to deepen and expand my experience. To support this aim, I bring the traditions of my cultural practice alongside my own experience. One of the aims of artistic research is to highlight individual experience so that it could be shared (e. g. Vadén, 2001; Slager, 2012). Also, feminist art historians have been interested in combining theory and practice. This is particularly apparent from a new materialistic point of view (e. g. Kontturi, 2012; Meskimmon, 2003).

The methodology of artistic research has led to a situation in which the embodiment of visual art practice is increasingly defined by experience. From the point of view of a visual artist, embodiment has been studied particularly in painting (e. g. Pitkänen-Walter, 2006; Houessou, 2010). Currently, knowledge about the experience of three-dimensional visual art practice is still limited (Siukonen, 2015). Earlier artistic research on three-dimensional art focused mainly on the viewer's perspective or, when the point of view has been the artist's, her finished works of art (e. g. Oja, 2011).

The theoretical part of my article is based on the research literature of phenomenological philosophy and new materialism and locating of feminism. Additionally, I explore artists'

reflections on their practice. While examining the experience of three-dimensional visual art practice with the method of artistic research, I illuminate the perspective of an artist. As I have written above, new materialist researchers have looked at the process of visual art practice. Instead of studying the experience of a viewer, my research subject is art-making. New materialism has been applied to art practice recently (Barrett & Bolt, 2013). However, the material and spatial perspective of the artist remains unexplored in research (see more Mäkikoskela & Kangasniemi, 2016).

In this article, the empirical research data conveys a series of events that emerged from my artwork entitled *From Hand to Mouth*. I portray the events as situation-specific and context-sensitive, so I narrate my art-making from the point of view of personal experience. I have written a story<sup>1</sup> of the evolving artwork, and I include it with the documentary photographs into my article. In the narrative, a practice-led approach to artistic research (Candy, 2006) is manifested. I use my working diary to support the story-telling, as the notes from it are temporally close to my art-making. Excerpts from the diary are distinguished italics, from the other text. The theoretical text and the narrative alternate in two different fonts throughout the article, going forward. The fragments of both texts are, however, in linear order. If the reader so desires, she or he can also read the texts separately.

I would like to begin with very familiar narrative words: Once upon a time... and I could continue in this way: There was a baby girl, born in a small town in the far north of Finland... However, I realize, that, here and now is perhaps not the place or time for that part of the story. Therefore, I skip ahead past the first ten years of my life, and start the story with the shared travels of my father, my siblings and myself to Haparanda, Sweden.

At that time, we used to drive up Haparanda on Sundays to do some shopping, both because almost everything was cheaper there, and because – somewhat unusually – shops were, actually open on Sundays. The visits also gave Dad an opportunity to speak Swedish. And maybe that was the real reason for the trips. We would usually end the trip with buying some sweets for the journey back home. However, my Dad was already then very concerned about his car, and we were not supposed to mess it up. This, of course, had an influence on our choice of candy. For example, Marabou chocolate was absolutely out of the question. So, I, along with my big sister, usually chose some candy laces flavored with strawberry, licorice or toffee.

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of the narrative was presented with a different theoretical framework at Art\*Eros\*Education Seminar at Aalto University (Mäkikoskela, 2012). Parts of the narrative have been published earlier in the joint article (Muukka-Marjovuuo et al., 2015). The narrative as a whole has been published in Finnish in the doctoral thesis (Mäkikoskela, 2015). It has been rewritten with the theoretical framework of this article.

The candy laces were rare treats, because back then, you could not buy them in Finland. The children in my family were not supposed to play with their food either, but this candy was an exception. Sitting in the back seat of a car for a long time is quite boring for kids, so my sister and I twisted, braided, knitted and crocheted our candy laces as a pastime. We played with them as if we would manipulate yarns for handicrafts. Before finally eating them.

As the above paragraphs show, I write differently from practice and theory. Academic writing steps aside when I narrate my art-making, and the literary way of writing brings forth sensory experiences and memories. The story is a means of emphasizing the artist's experience and the practical method of artistic research. In the narrative, the perspective of an artist reveals the unique features and meanings of a single event as well as the experiential knowledge of an individual.

### **Movement in three-dimensional visual art practice**

Next, I jump ahead many years, to the time Ikea began opening stores in Finland. Their approach seemed to be rapidly changing the Finnish way of decorating homes, and I wanted to go visit the source of this miracle. On one Saturday evening, I, along with my husband and kids, ended up taking our first tour of Ikea while we were very hungry. Of course, Ikea had also thought of this sort of situation beforehand, and they conveniently had a little Swedish food shop next to the checkout. In there, I saw very familiar looking candy laces, of the same type we had bought with my sister, beyond the border of the Tornio River all those years ago on our way home from Haparanda. As I had not come across them since then, I did not have any choice but to buy them.



**Picture 1. The strawberry candy laces opened from the bag in the artist's studio. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**

I want to play with the candy laces again, so I bring some of them to my studio. Once there, I have the chance to take my time with them and roll them in my hands to feel my experiences. While doing so again, I am confronted with many important memories of my life. That is what my hands tell me, and it is wonderful to rely on them.



**Picture 2. A drawing from the artist's own left hand. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**

There is something fascinating in my hands. And I do not know what it is. First, I draw my hands but I am able to reach back into my childhood memories only by holding and rolling the actual material, the candy laces, in my hands. This is the reason why I wanted to emphasize the hands: their tactile memory held all the meanings of this material, as they went from hand to mouth. Then I recall Bruce Nauman's artwork which has the same title. The work is a cast of the part of his own body, and consequently very pictorial.



**Picture 3. Bruce Nauman, *From Hand to Mouth*, 1967, wax over cloth.**

As a sensory practice, three-dimensional art-making is extremely individual. On the other hand, it is additionally social and historical because it has been practiced in our culture for a long time. Thus, it has become an established cultural practice (Carroll, 1988, p. 140-149). One of the traditional views of art as a cultural practice includes the possibility for two- and three-dimensional expressions. Visual perception, observed mainly by sight, can be generated as a two-dimensional picture on the surface, or expressed as space and volume in a three-dimensional form. Both of these modes of action have their own special features (Giacometti, 1948/1992, p. 32-33; Morris, 1970/1993, p. 73-75; Bourgeois, 2008, p. 255; Oja, 2011, p. 13-19) and their own history (Ellegood, 2009, p. 6; Potts, 2009, p. ix-xiii, 1-23).

When a visual artist works on a two-dimensional surface, she most often defines the front side of the work. The back side of the work is not relevant to the whole. Three-dimensional works of art, such as sculptures and installations, are pictures that appear in material form and in the surrounding space (Morris, 1967/1993, p. 26-27; Tihinen, 2010, p. 22-27). The front, the sides, and the back of the three-dimensional work of art are all significant because it is impossible to perceive the work as a whole from only one viewing angle (Ellegood, 2009, p. 6; Morris, 1967/1993, p. 26). The sensory perceptions blend when experiencing a three-dimensional work of art; the visual, material, and spatial combine. The artist observes in motion as she traverses around the work. At the same time, the front, the sides, and the back of the work change places.

As a result, the artist's body and its movement have special characteristics in three-dimensional visual art practice.

I have always tried to let go of my past, and now I want to review the embodied memories of my childhood from that moment of my life. A lot of life experience has passed between the time of those memories and this moment. For example, my experience of my own family: an artist couple and their kids, stand in stark contrast to my bourgeois childhood and upbringing. I find myself wanting to protect my hands and the memories they carry, even though everything in my childhood was not always as sweet and beautiful as candy laces. On the other hand, not everything in my current life is unambiguously hard. In the lens of this moment, I can see the choices I have needed to make during my life. You just cannot have it all.

I continue to draw my hands and to play with the candy laces every now and then. In order to transport myself back to my childhood memories, I need the laces themselves and the physical act of handling them. I do the very same things with them that I did along my sister back then, but I also try something new. As a sculptor, I want to make some forms with them; now nicely curled or twisted laces, which back then as kids helped us to get more candy into our mouths at the time, are not enough anymore. I experiment with the material, and as we continue to confront, I make suggestions to this material, and obviously it is also actively participating in our negotiations.

## From chiasmatic confrontation to material resistance

Material, space, and body are intertwined in three-dimensional visual art practice while the artist works as a moving body, in time and space. When pursuing the work of art, she observes sensuously. The sensory nature of the activity can be explored through Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968, p. 133-155, 214-215, 261-265) notion of chiasm, which defines the relationship of perceiving and being perceived<sup>2</sup>. As one is perceiving, one experiences the perceived to be perceiving simultaneously. For example, touching cannot occur without the touched, but perceiving differs from being perceived. The practitioner has the ability to chiasm as a body, or, in other words, to turn from perceiving to being perceived and vice versa. But the chiasmatic turn can only be done with the other.

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is usually accompanied by visual observations and two-dimensional visual art. In his late philosophy, however, he goes on to write more and more about touching, flesh, chiasm and intertwining with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). For this reason, Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy is of particular importance to three-dimensional visual art (see also Potts, 2009, p. 209, 213).

The physical act of handling the candy laces brings up the idea of protecting my memories again and again. I grew up in northern Finland, so the first thing that occurs to me that could protect my hands are mittens. Then, I remember Anu Tuominen's work entitled, "Hunger". Her mittens are old and worn and flat. Since they are sewn together and upside down, they look like empty container, almost as if they are begging.



**Picture 4. Anu Tuominen, *Hunger*, 1997, found, together sewn mittens. Photo: Anu Tuominen**

I apply chiasm for three-dimensional art-making as follows: When working on an artwork, the artist touches the material shape, and the material of the evolving artwork simultaneously affects to the artist's touching. The working material of a visual artist is most often dead material in the sense that it does not perceive. My intention is not to anthropomorphize or to humane my working material, but to examine it as an actant (see also Hekman, 2008, p. 89-105). Every material exists in each working event as a substance that takes its space and place in accordance with its own characteristics and behaves in its own way in the hands of the artist and under gravity.

I strive to shift the attention from human- and artist-centred making and thinking, to three-dimensional visual art practice in which the material is actively affecting to the artist's touch and the emerging work of art<sup>3</sup>. The activity and effectiveness of the working material occur in the

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<sup>3</sup> At this point, my research is connected to the post-humanist movement that differs in its approach from conventional humanistic thinking, by overthrowing the human subject as a coherent and dominant entity in nature. Braidotti (2013), for example, raises the question of how to examine the individual's many flexible and changing identities instead of controlling the subject's cognitive and moral self.

practical example of this article. In the narrative, the working material participates in the chiasmatic confrontation in accordance with its own characteristics and acts reciprocally. Through the notion of chiasm, I can conceptualize the character of three-dimensional art practice, which is not only abstract but also tangible in corporeality.

I want to position these covers for my hands, my mittens, palms down – together but separate. When I work with my two separate and individual hands, I have more options. If I tie them up together, I feel as though I am handicapped, as if there are not very many possibilities for me to affect the course of my life. Due to the working material I have chosen, my mittens will not fall flat. They will be plump. They will be forms that seem very pleased with themselves but are empty. They will be the mittens of the generation of sweeties and soda pops.

However, on the twenty-ninth of August 2007, I wrote in my diary:

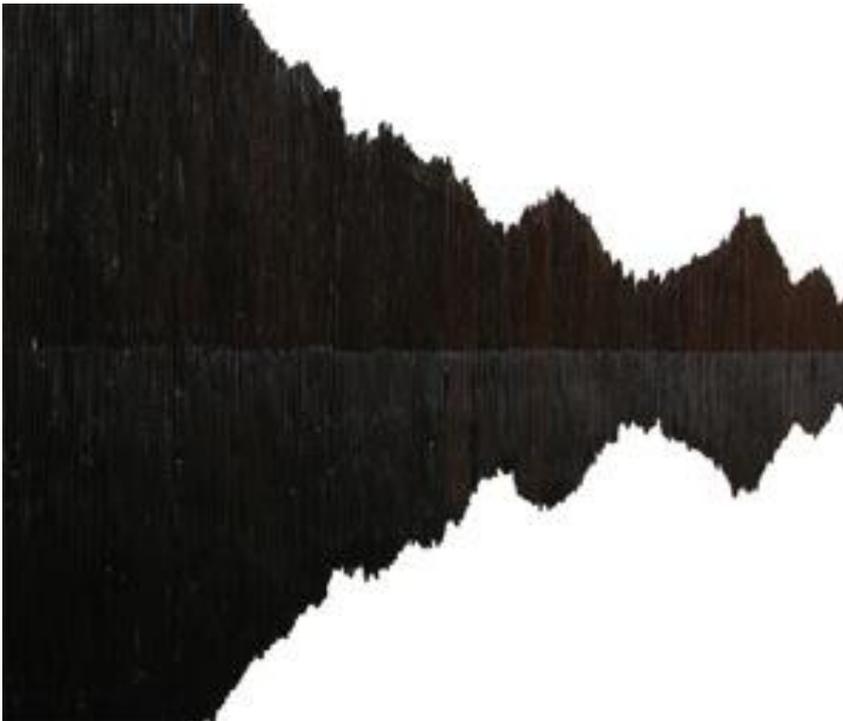
*My working with laces is not proceeding. I have been trying very hard all the hot late summer day. I am constantly struggling and my material is not helping me at all. I want to knit the laces to mittens the size of my hands. The material does not allow me to force it into the form I want. The laces just crack and break. In addition to this, nothing happens in my studio today. I give up.*

The chiasmatic confrontation between the artist and the emerging work of art generates resistance related to the material and spatial practice. Juha Varto (1994; 2008) terms activity-related resistance as the resistance of the world. I see it as a broad concept of phenomenological philosophy that parses a practitioner's experience. Gert Biesta (2012, p. 94-95), in turn, uses the concept of the experience of resistance of this character of activity. With it, he suggests that the material and social world of a practitioner is not a projection of her or his mind. Instead, her world has an existence of its own. This means it is fundamentally different from the practitioner. In my research, I study art-making, in which the work of art is formed from material in space. This is why I have specified the resistance of the world and the experience of resistance into the material resistance (Mäkikoskela 2012; 2015).

When working on a three-dimensional piece of art, the artist confronts the active working material in chiasm. In the narrative of the article, material resistance resides in art practice as the artist's movement confronts an emerging artwork. In this chiasmatic confrontation, she recognizes the material resistance by focusing on her body and its senses as well as the active material. In my three-dimensional practice, through the experience of material resistance, I discover what is myself and what is the other. With the other, I can see my work from the outside, which is not possible through internal perception or self-reflection. In the chiasmatic

confrontation and against material resistance, I can pay attention, instead of one-way working, to my surroundings. Sometimes I alternate constantly within my body's interior and exterior.

I willingly returned to square one and decided to go out for a walk. I headed along the River Vantaa, towards the meadows, wind breaths and sunlight. I was still thinking of the supportive horizon, which the northern landscape of my childhood has offered me. I walked along the River Vantaa and crossed the river the same way as we did when arriving at Haparanda by Dad's car. Building from this, and from my experiences of crossing the border of the Tornio River, the horizon, and becoming one with the landscape, I made this installation.



**Pictures 5 and 6. Riikka Mäkikoskela, *At the Horizon*, 2008-2009, cut licorice flavored candy laces, dimensions are variable, for example 47 x 264 x 0,5 - 66 x 440 x 0,5 cm. Photos: Riikka Mäkikoskela**



While working with active material, an artist can experience expressions and meanings

generated by the other party of chiasm. According to Tony Cragg (1996/1998, p. 81-84), it varies who leads the sculptural practice. Sometimes it is led by an artist and sometimes by the material. Cragg bases his claim on the sculptor's experience, but in his short text, he does not justify the argument in detail. With the concept of material resistance, I can support this sculptor's experiential argument. In the narrative of this article, the active material and the resistance it induces sets the pace for my art-making either by accepting work or by complicating it, but the material resistance may also stop my work altogether. In addition to these options, the active material can also propose something else than what I have thought, as it happens in the story.

Because of the delicate material of this piece, I have had to make the installation all over again every time I exhibited it. The problem with organic material is that it dries in a couple of months. As I was doing it for the third time, I was quite fed up and thought, that it would be so nice to do something else, perhaps even not changing the material. The candy laces still seemed meaningful and interesting to me. I wanted to continue with them still. Or should I just go backwards? But if I am going to make the mittens, I definitely cannot knit them.

Material resistance provides a fruitful opportunity if one tries to give the material an active role in art practice. For example, the material resistance separates me from the emerging work but also engages me in the reciprocal activity with the work. This means I do not force working material against its characteristics or try to change its character. As I engage in material resistance, I do not try to control my making, but I meet the evolving work of art, confront it in chiasm and experience what it has to offer in a series of reciprocal working events. In this case, the emerging work becomes the other party of my practice, and the border fences disappear between the animate and the inanimate and the human and the non-human.

## Localization in three-dimensional visual art practice

Three-dimensional visual art practice can be located in the body, its movement, and cooperation with active material, as it has done already in this article, but art practice can also be understood within a social, cultural and historical framework. In the narrative, this emerges in how an artist works within and beyond her cultural practice. According to phenomenological philosophy, sensory experience is associated with time and place (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 139-140, 261-262; 1964/2012, p. 421). However, this kind of activity has rarely been studied from the perspective of practice or experience. According to feminism that emphasizes materiality, taking the body's materiality into account is the first step in the localization of the activity

(Braidotti, 1994, p. 161). The artist's body becomes a part of the materiality of the practice as she collaborates with her working material. In this event, three-dimensional visual art practice is also located.

On the fifteenth of June 2010, the issue is illuminated in a new way:

*Why am I so stupid, that I do not get it? I am not in the situation like this for the first time. If I choose a certain material, I need to proceed on its terms. Even though I reject knitting, I should be able to make forms like mittens out of strawberry laces some other way. It looks like my next solo exhibition will be about repetition and cyclicity. Would that help me with the mittens, too?*

I seize the idea but this practical question cannot be solved by thought. So, I go and buy some new bags of strawberry laces in Ikea. I confront the challenging material again in my studio and try to build the shape of a mitten by repeating and circulating the material. I wrap the lace around my left wrist and try to get it protected in this way. Next, I shape the plastic tape, which lays on the table, to the form of my wrist and swirl and glue laces on the supporting tape form.

In three-dimensional art-making, visibility, materiality, and spatiality combine. The artist looks by moving when she or he is traversing around or in the evolving piece. When the artist is working on a piece by touching, she confronts it materially. In this chiasmatic confrontation, material resistance manifests itself, and the resistance separates the artist from the emerging work of art. Through touch, the otherness of the work becomes concrete. Against the material resistance, the artist can distinguish what she is in relation to her surroundings. The artist is not just somewhere, for example in her or his imagination, but exists concretely in a specific time and place.



**Picture 7. New try with strawberry laces. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**

18 November 2010 I note: *Awesome! The thick, clear packing tape works like a support for the laces. But still I had no guarantee that the laces glued on tape would last, for example, over the course of one exhibition. When the laces of the At the Horizon work became dry, they cracked and dropped down. Could I put something on them to get them last longer? Maybe the manufacturer could help me?*

Within feminist thought, new materialism (Haraway, 2008; Hekman, 2008) generates an additional dimension to the movement and locating of three-dimensional visual art practice by defining an active material. When material is considered active, the motion of material, in addition to artist's movement, can be taken into account. The movement of both artist and material and their temporary localizations form a series of events in which chiasmatic touching and being touched or affecting and being affected alternate. As materially located, the artist ponders the alternatives of her work and makes decisions. In the situated making, the uniqueness and singularity of happening is emphasized. For example, what is already thought and made cannot be arbitrarily repeated, because it cannot be abstracted or idealized separately in thinking about acting.

The artist moving around or inside the emerging three-dimensional work of art will locate herself in relation to the work, time and time again. Thus, each location is always alterable, complex, and controversial. From each of them will open a partial perspective that Donna

Haraway (1991, p. 196) defines as follows: partial views have special meanings but do not have unambiguous content. However, the practitioner must first be somewhere and from there she can find a broader perspective. For example, Rich (2003/1984) describes how her artistic practice as a writer is affected by who she is and where she works. Writing and reading, however, differ from three-dimensional visual art because words usually exist as ideas or concepts and are written on a two-dimensional surface. They seldom are worked into material form in corporeality.

The staff of the confectionery company was very kind and curious about my art-making. Their product design team was able to provide several options on how to work with the candy laces. With their advice, I started doing more tests.



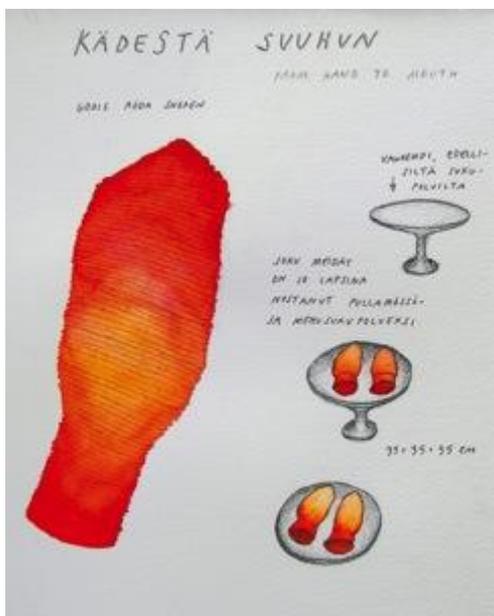
**Picture 8. Experiments on the effect of different substances on the laces. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**

The localization of practice reveals the artist's history, memory, multiple identities, and incompleteness. The artist can remember previous locations and think of them in the current location from a new perspective. The material body can be understood as a stratification of experience when the artist rearranges her old experiences together with her new perceptions. Time changes a specific angle of view, and a practitioner may choose to switch to viewing from other angles as well. This way, the localization is based on material and spatial movement. With new materialism and localization of feminist theory, the conceptualization of the chiasmatic movement of three-dimensional

visual art practice can be continued, and the justification of the concept of material resistance can be furthered. The artist of the narrative holds fast to her discipline by connecting her individual expression to the continuum of a cultural practice (see also Siukonen, 2015, p. 39). In this experiential relationship, new materialism offers novel theoretical concepts in seeking the combination of discursive and material (e. g. Hekman, 2008, p. 91-92). From this perspective, the sensuality and experiential quality of three-dimensional visual art practice can be refined and located as the materiality that does not exclude the discursive locating of conceptual art.

## Close and far

Now, since there is a spark of hope, I want to keep going. At the same time as I am gluing the laces on the tape forms, I think about different options for exhibiting these mittens of candy laces. I draw a new sketch to try it out.



Picture 9. Sketch 7 February 2011. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela

In the sketch, I placed the mittens palms down on a glass cake stand. I would like to use an even more old-fashioned, decorative cake stand for a pedestal. In other words, I want to make a reference to the older generation. For, as horrible as it sounds in the Finnish art scene, I feel that

my upper middleclass upbringing is still supporting my art practice. This is why I want to raise the candy lace mittens up to the cake stand, as a festive act.

Nowadays the conceptual and pictorial journey from hand to mouth is no longer so straight, frank and clear as in Nauman's artwork, for our visual culture is quickly changing and becoming more multi-dimensional. Candy laces, like sweet dreams, will not remain unchanging and static for very long. They are both multisensory and related to the specific locations. Even though I can already interweave a number of conceptual meanings into my work, not everything is clear and done. The resistance of material itself continues to strongly affect my working process. The form I have created turns out to be something other than what I have conceived of and drawn. In fact, it does not look at all like a mitten.

In the series of events of art practice I have described, material resistance puts boundary conditions on my expression when testing the phenomena that occur in my experience against material resistance. The sensory activity, so to speak, draws me into chiasm with the work. It also locates my art-making. I move to figure out the evolving work of art, and art happens in motion. I move in relation to myself and in relation to the evolving work of art. The movements between close and far away become significant.

I distance myself from my material working, as this is an important part of art-making as a cultural practice. The need to take a distance is precisely the case with practice. As practical working changes into looking, new kinds of ways of seeing one's own work raises. When I step backwards, the emerging work of art is no longer dependent solely on my personal interests or practical goals. As I have described in the story, from time to time I let go of making, I step farther away to have some distance from which I look at my work analytically in relation to my experiential horizon and the tradition of practice. After that, I return to the work and continue making close until I need outward orientation, viewing in a wider context.

Material works of art do not evolve without close attention. From far away I look at my work in relation to the cultural practice of visual art. Alex Potts (2009, p. 228) sums up the essence of action as "Seeing is having at a distance". Merleau-Ponty (1964/2012, p. 447-468) further emphasizes that seeing is not a presence for himself. Instead, it is the way the practitioner moves away from himself, to take part in his environment. As has already become very clear, my research method includes a sensory and individual activity. On the other hand, art practice is additionally social and historical because it has become an established cultural practice. My distance from the evolving artwork sets me apart from my material working experience. In the narrative of the article, I move out of myself towards my surroundings with the help of the act of distancing.

I rummage amongst the mittens my Grandma had made for me, taking them out of their storage boxes. I put one of them onto my left hand, and make a model of it from old newspapers. With the help of this form guide, I make some new experiments. I learn that when swirling the laces around the tapes on the model, I have to anticipate the changes in form quite early in the process. The form can be shaped slowly, and this makes the composition of the form challenging. The model certainly helps my work, even though I cannot swirl the laces entirely onto them.



**Picture 10. The mold made of newspapers and with the help of a knitted mitten. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**



**Picture 11. New try to achieve a specific shape. Photo: Riikka Mäkikoskela**

In three-dimensional visual art practice, close attention to detail is just as important as

taking distance. According to Louise Bourgeois (2008, p. 142-143, 195, 368), art is made by re-evaluating and re-formulating continuously. In creative practice, the purpose of activity is not known in advance. Sometimes making changes decisively when the image meets the material. When I work with the material in chiasm, I do not try to control the progress of the activity towards an outcome I know beforehand. I make decisions in the process, and they always require the sensory relationship between the artist and the emerging work. This activity can be done in chiasm either close-up by touching or being touched or farther away from the distance by seeing and being seen.

The new shapes of mittens become plastic from the wrists. Even the narrowing of the shape is possible by swirling. I get the smoother sizing and nothing breaks yet. Also, the test laces are working fairly well, using layers of glycerol and acrylic varnish. Perhaps, I may at last be able to succeed in this.

I somehow feel that the thirty-five years of my life start to culminate, in this point of time, in this sculpture:



**Pictures 12 and 13. Riikka Mäkikoskela, *From Hand to Mouth*, 2011, strawberry flavored candy laces, tape, glue, glycerol, acrylic varnish and glass cake stand, 18 x 29 x 29 cm. Photos: Riikka Mäkikoskela**



I move between far to close and back far again in both three-dimensional visual art practice and the analytical stage of artistic research. Theoretical review of one's work has traditionally demanded distance. My practice-led research method brings along a perspective of a participant, from which I cannot break away in the traditional sense. Moving further goes beyond subjectivity, but does not lead to objectivity in the classical sense (Varto, 1995, p. 65, 91-97). Through my research methods, I study the internal aspects of my research process – as though I were making a work of art inside it. I also have the opportunity to review my activity from a distance perspective, in relation to cultural practice and research.

When I work on the material form in space, my body is a resistor to the surrounding area. I can also feel the resistance which focuses on my body in chiasm. I employ this activity as part of my research method, and it opens up a special opportunity for research when art practice leads my theoretical review. Through the embodiment of this research activity and the material resistance related to it, I identify my research material and what is relevant to it. Material resistance is one of the main elements of my research, with which I justify the methodology of artistic research. Additionally, I question my location as a researcher whose research method includes personal art-making with material resistance. The communication and reliability of my study is based not only on the internalisation of the individuality of my research method but also on the nature of visual art as a type of established cultural practice.

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