

I'm not religious. Am I?

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I grew up in a home where religion wasn't part of the conversation. Raised in one of the world's most secular countries, Sweden, spirituality always felt distant and abstract to me. In the book *Granskogsfolk - hur naturen blev svenskarnas religion*, David Thurfjell examines how many Swedes, despite their secular identities, engage with nature and spirituality in ways that resemble religious practices (2020, p 9). His work resonates with my own experience: for most of my life, I found comfort in atheism and the clear-cut logic of a world without a higher power. However, like Thurfjell describes, I felt a quiet curiosity about unseen forces that might shape our lives. I began exploring these ideas through meditation and long walks in the forest, though it never moved beyond that.

This personal curiosity towards spirituality took a turn during our LiLa field week in Finland, where I got an insight to the Sami religion through the exploration of art, history and stories. As I understand it, the Sami people view the world as a living unit, as if the rivers, trees, and mountains hold their own spirits, waiting to communicate with those who are willing to listen.

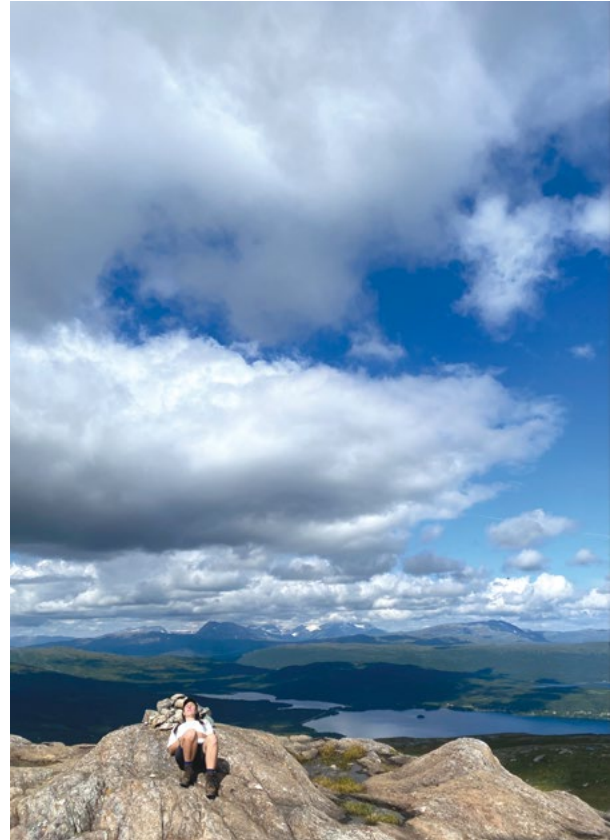


Figure 1. *Atoklinten, Hemavan*. Image: Karlsson, 2024

After some research it got clear to me that in many indigenous cultures, there is no separation between the natural world and the spiritual one. This belief, called animism, is explained by Ingold (2018, p. 139) as a complex network where humans, plants, animals are linked throughout the cosmos in a mutual interaction.

To collaborate with nature

My LiLa project was born from these observations and experiences in Finland. They inspired a shift

Figure 2. Voutso, Finland. Image: Karlsson, 2024



in how I approached my own life and relationship with the natural world. Could I see nature not just as a setting for my life, but as something larger than myself? Something sacred? Could I through my art practice explore my own relationship with nature. What would happen if I invited nature to be a co-narrator, a collaborator in this project?

Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes about the idea of dwelling, suggesting that human life is not just a series of activities against a neutral backdrop, but a process that unfolds with the landscape itself. He

Figure 3. Image: Karlsson, 2024



argues that the landscape holds the memories and lives of those who have interacted with it before us, and that our presence in it continues this story (2018, p. 235). I wanted to incorporate this perspective of dwelling through my artistic process. In this essay, I will share this journey of my collaboration with nature itself, how bringing together movement, cyanotype printing and spirituality to create a piece that is as much about the process as the final product.

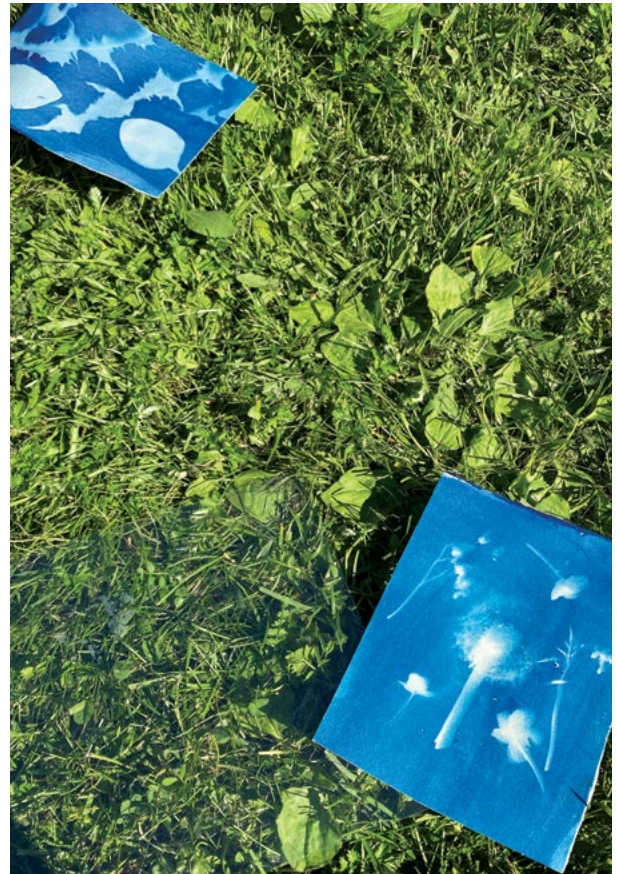
*Figure 4. Experimenting with cyanotype by Ume-river.
Image: Karlsson, 2024*



Cyanotype - Making prints with the sun

My process started with exploring cyanotype printing. Cyanotype is a photographic process where paper (or other materials) are coated with light-sensitive chemicals and then exposed to sunlight. The developing process can vary from about 5 minutes to 5 hours depending on factors like time of the day, if you are inside or outside and the weather. When developed you get prints with a beautiful prussian blue color.

Figure 5. Finished prints. Image: Karlsson, 2024



I coated papers in the light sensitive emulsion and started printing. I printed anything I could get my hands on: shadows in my apartment, photographs, flowers, branches, stones, water. When using the sun's energy to make the prints, I wasn't in complete control. The weather, the angle of the sun, and the clouds all played roles in determining the final outcome, every print became unique and the result was unpredictable. Nature undeniably played its role.

The resulting cyanotypes reflect moments of connection with nature, such as when the sun shines through the trees, casting intricate, ever-changing patterns of shadow and light. These moments are fleeting, but through cyanotype, I capture them—creating a lasting image of nature's subtle energy.

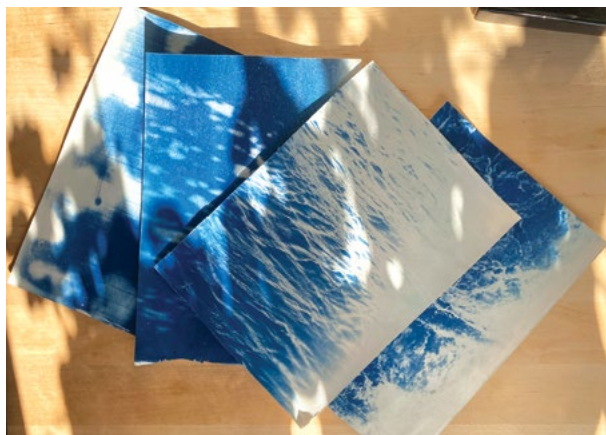


Figure 6. Image: Karlsson, 2024

Kinetic Energy - The Power of Motion

Movement has always fascinated me, especially the kind of natural, unforced movement that wind cre-

ates. When I watch the shadows of leaves swaying in the breeze or the ripple of water on a river, I am

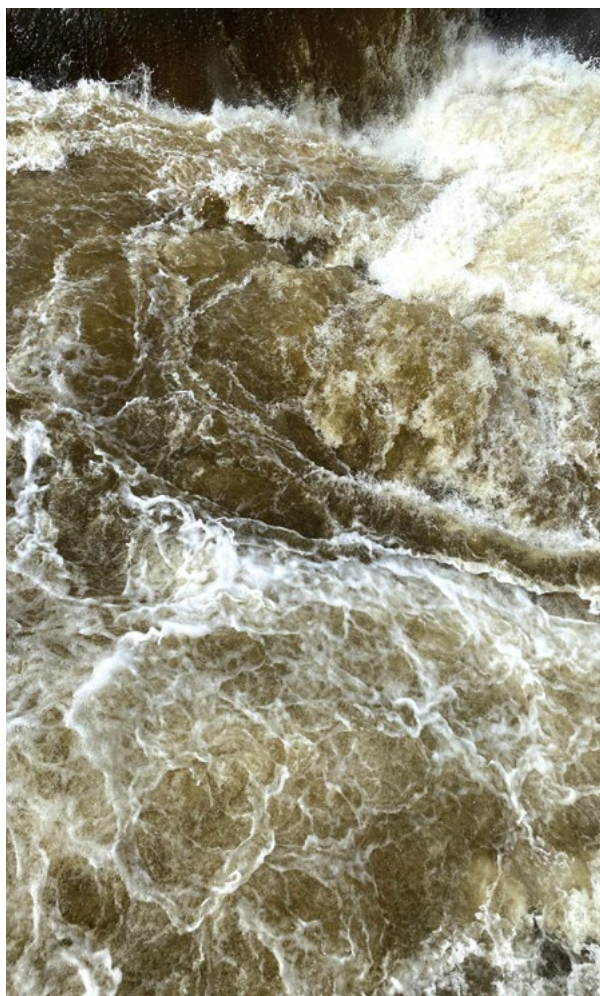


Figure 7. Ume-river. Image: Karlsson, 2024

mesmerized by the constant motion. These movements, like the cyanotypes, are both predictable and unpredictable, driven by forces beyond our control.

The idea to make a kinetic mobile grew from this fascination for movement. Through the mobile, I aimed to embody the same kind of kinetic energy that animates the natural world. As the mobile moves, it becomes a living piece—never static, always changing, much like nature itself. The movement is subtle, like the dance of light on water or the sway of branches in the wind. It is not something you control but something you observe and interact with.

This kinetic energy, much like spiritual energy, is invisible yet present, influencing the world in ways that can be felt even if they cannot be seen. It mirrors the meditative peace I find in nature, where small, constant movements—like the flow of a river or the rustle of leaves—bring a sense of calm and continuity.

By incorporating motion into my work, I wanted to invite viewers into a meditative state, where they could contemplate the relationship between nature and the spirit. The mobile becomes not just an object to look at but a dynamic experience, one that shifts and evolves with the space it inhabits.

Conclusions

The process of creating art in collaboration with nature is an act of unfolding, a form of dwelling, where the unpredictable elements of the natural world contribute as much to the creation as I do, guiding the process rather than being controlled by it. This unfolding reminds me that we are not separate from nature, but part of an ongoing dialogue with it, constantly shaping and being shaped by our surroundings.

My work became a dialogue between myself and nature, a way of reconnecting with something larg-

er than myself. Sweden may be a secular country, and I may have been raised without religion, but through this process, I've come to understand that spirituality doesn't have to be tied to a specific belief system. It can be found in the quiet moments, in the wind that moves through the trees, in the sunlight that transforms a cyanotype print.

References:

Ingold, T. (2018). *Totemism, animism and the depiction of animals. The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (pp. 136–162). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003196662-9>

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