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Holding Hands Through Generations

The elements of nature have served humanity for ages, providing sustenance and kindling creativity. The Earth's landscape has undergone continuous transformations, which was notably evident in places such as Umeå city and Högklinten by Höga Kusten, where our LiLa group task-scaped this spring. Being there directed my attention to the minutiae within the grand tapestry of the natural world. It became evident that even the smallest details within this expansive landscape held transformative power, accentuating the vital role that seemingly minor components play.



Inspired by these subtle yet impactful details, a notion took root during conversations with fellow LiLa participants. I envisioned harnessing these elements from nature to imbue yarn with colour. The tradition of gathering plants to dye yarn is a time-honoured craft, with knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. In other words, in an underscoring of its practical and tactile transmission, knowledge is passed down from hand to hand. Therefore, it became clear to me that I would knit a pair of mittens with this yarn. In doing so, I sought to recontextualise these natural details by pre-

Figure 1. Amongst the old seabed in Högklinten lay rugged rock formations adorned with lichen, meticulously weaving vibrant patterns and infusing colour into the otherwise grey rocks. Images: Frida Langseth, 2023.



servicing their essence whilst placing them within a new narrative, one that embodies the enduring connection between tradition, nature and creativity.

The Art-Based Approach

Natural dyeing is a universal practice and a tradition that extends back to our ancestors, who sourced their pigments from nature by traversing the landscape and actively engaging with their surroundings. Their knowledge about materials was related to local information about different forest habitats and lore about the correct time to harvest for different needs (Stöckell, 2018). As we follow our ancestors' footsteps, we maintain a link to them and to the environment with which they interacted. Ingold (1993) portrayed the landscape as a living

Figure 2. These seemingly small details play integral roles in the environment. No matter how seemingly minor, it is important to understand and value every element within an ecosystem.
Images: Frida Langseth, 2023.



record of past generations' endeavours, marked by the imprints of their actions and pathways. According to Ingold, our interaction with the landscape not only shapes us but also integrates itself into our very essence, forging a reciprocal bond between us and our surroundings.

Part 1: Collecting Plants

I walked through the landscape, collecting lichen and Scotch heather whilst contemplating their significance within the larger ecosystem. Although lichen and Scotch heather may appear inconspicuous in the vast landscape, I could not help but ponder how their absence might reshape the entire picture.

Even though they are individually small, their collective presence contributes to the overall visual and eco-

Figure 3. Not over-harvesting and avoiding damage to the surroundings helps to maintain the appearance and ecological integrity of the landscape. Image: Frida Langseth, 2023.

logical composition of the area. This insight emphasises the interconnectedness of all elements in nature and the potential consequences of disturbing this delicate balance.

My top priority was to make sure that my presence left no trace behind so that the landscape retained its untouched allure. This commitment aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 12 (2015), which promotes sustainable consumption and production practices. It encourages individuals to reduce their environmental footprints, highlighting the significance of being mindful and responsible when interacting with the environment.

Part 2: Colouring the Yarn

I was excited about the outcome of my yarn dyeing project, wondering about the colours that would emerge

from using lichen for one yarn and Scotch heather for the other. I had my grandmother with me in this part of the project. We carried out this process outdoors, adhering to traditional methods with a crackling bonfire. My grandmother shared her knowledge of yarn colouring, which shows how traditions are passed down through generations. This kind of knowledge transmission is a rich part of human culture and heritage.

The benefits of experience in nature include the strengthening of respect towards nature (Stöckell, 2018), which underscores the harmonious relationship between culture and nature and reminds us that many traditional practices were born out of a deep understanding and respect for the environment. This highlights how traditional knowledge often contains eco-friendly methods that can be applied in contemporary contexts to promote sustainability.

Figure 4. The approach of dyeing yarn by the bonfire using traditional methods highlights the value of traditional practices and their relevance in today's world, as they offer a deep connection to history and the environment. Images: (a) Frida Langseth, 2023, (b) and (c) Helen Langseth, 2023.





Figure 5 a, b. My grandmother, sharing her knowledge, ensures that valuable practices are preserved and continue to thrive, and this experience is a testament to the rich tapestry of cultural heritage and how wisdom is lovingly handed down from one generation to the next. Images: (a) Peder Johnsen, 2023, (b) Helen Langseth, 2023.

Part 3: Knitting a Pair of Mittens

In today's world, where most goods are industrially produced, the act of creating one's own objects carries an empowering dimension. This self-sufficiency is not just a personal achievement; it also links us to past generations, for whom self-made tools and objects were essential for survival (Stöckell, 2018). Knitting mittens hold special significance in our cold climate, as they are not just mere accessories but essential tools and a symbol of practicality and warmth, serving as a shield against the biting cold.

Beyond their functionality, they carry the warmth of tradition and craftsmanship, bridging generations as we continue to create these items by hand. In our cold climate, mittens serve as a testament to the resilience and ingenuity of those who have adapted to our environment (Gårdvik, 2021), a small but meaningful expression of our connection to the land and each other.

Conclusion

The appreciation for the interconnectedness of elements in the environment led me to a desire to incorporate nature's details into the art of yarn dyeing and knitting,



Figure 5 c,d. Images:(c) Frida Langseth, 2023 and (d) Peder Johnsen, 2023.

connecting tradition, culture and sustainability. The art-based approach involves collecting lichen and Scotch heather and considering their ecological significance. Using traditional methods for yarn dyeing showcases the relevance of age-old practices in contemporary contexts that promote sustainability. The act of crafting a pair of mittens reinforces the link to ancestors who relied on self-made tools for survival. The cycle of cultur-

al heritage, tradition, conservation and self-sufficiency weave a rich tapestry that connects us to our roots whilst empowering us to shape a sustainable and meaningful future. It is through these intricate threads that we honour the legacy of our forebears and preserve the wisdom they pass down. By knitting mittens with yarn dyed from plants, I feel like I am not only preserving tradition but also weaving a story into the very fabric of the mittens. The landscape itself, with its stark beauty and history, has become an integral part of my contemplation.

References

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