

# Going Elsewhere

RESEARCH LAB CRAFT AT THE CHINESE PAVILION

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MATERIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CHINESE PAVILION



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## Research Lab at the Chinese Pavilion

RESEARCH LAB IS A YEAR LONG course run by Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design. The course is aimed at professional artists working with craft who are interested in artistic research.

This year we have had the immense pleasure of working with the Royal Palaces in Sweden at the Chinese Pavilion in Drottningholm. Built in 1753 as a birthday present for Queen Lovisa Ulrika, The Chinese Pavilion remains a gift for those who encounter it today.

As was popular across Europe, the Pavilion reflects European fantasies of China and incorporates objects imported from the East. The Chinese Pavilion tells us as much about Sweden as it does about China, and reminds us of the long history of shared ideas, movement and collaboration between countries. This hybrid fusion, confusion and mistranslation lends the Pavilion a playful character – a place to escape the everyday and to dream.

This year, each of the nine artists on the Research Lab course have taken the Pavilion as their starting

point to create new work. From national stereotypes to Wunderkammer, lanterns to lacquer, each artist has found the connections between this Pavilion and their practice. Hopefully these interventions will enrich the experience of those visiting the building and encourage new ways of viewing the Pavilion.

Opportunities to work with historic buildings are rare, and I am incredibly grateful to the team at the Royal Palaces who enabled and encouraged this last year. Thanks in particular go to Bronwyn Griffith who has made a very complex project seem so effortless.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the artists exhibiting at the Pavilion. It has been a huge pleasure working with them and this exhibition is a reflection of their hard work, creativity, skill and collegiality.

**Matt Smith**

*Professor of Craft, specialising in  
Ceramics and Glass,  
Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design*





## Past is Prologue

THERE IS MUCH DISCUSSION of the importance of historic preservation and conservation. Something that is given less attention is why it is important and what we can do to encourage people to see that historic sites remain relevant today.

When the opportunity arose to host Konstfack's Research Lab Craft, the Royal Palaces saw an exciting opportunity to invite students to work with one of our most treasured sites: The Chinese Pavilion. As part of Drottningholm it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the best preserved examples of 18th century chinoiserie in Europe. Built with a focus on decorative arts, the Chinese Pavilion is full of potentially inspiring objects and narratives to work with or against.

Research Lab Craft provides students with an open forum for reflection, inspiration and dialogue. Using a historic collection as a starting point, the students create their own process, drawing inspiration from materials, history and the spaces in-between. The Chinese Pavilion is well suited for such an undertaking, since it is full of objects that openly reflect inspiration from other cultures and sources. Bringing contemporary craft into the pavilion opens the possibility of adding further interpretations and creations inspired by the unique site.

*Going elsewhere – Material Interpretations of the Chinese Pavilion* invites visitors on a journey to the past through the present. Each artist has developed independent concepts and artworks in relation to the

Chinese Pavilion. The approaches and references are as diverse as the materials that they use. Natural-history, exoticism, storytelling, global trade, humour – each has brought a unique perspective that encourages us to take another look, to take a closer look through the lens of contemporary creativity.

That the Chinese Pavilion has inspired some of the students to explore new materials is an exemplification of how historic objects are anything but static. The ideas and creations of the past have the potential to influence and inspire the present and even the future – past is prologue. The privilege and opportunity of The Swedish Royal Court is to continue to invite visitors and creators to explore our unique buildings and collections. And it is important to remember why we make such efforts to preserve them, it is not to close them off from the world, it is to prolong their ability to reach visitors in the distant future.

I am grateful to HM King Carl XVI Gustaf for recognizing the value of giving contemporary artists the opportunity to exhibit at the Chinese Pavilion. I would also like to thank Matt Smith and Anders Ljungberg from Konstfack for their vision in initiating the collaboration with the Royal Collections, my colleagues for supporting the project and the artists who filled the Pavilion with new perspectives.

**Bronwyn Griffith**

*Curator of Exhibitions, The Swedish Royal Court*





## Staying with the past – It never passed

THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES the arts and crafts have, in the act of collecting, reflected social differences within hierarchical societies. One example of this is in the field of silver smithing, where the material itself has been strongly connected to both currency and economy of war. However, craft also carries connection to everyday life and the actions that make up the quotidian. Exclusive materials and materials crafted exquisitely have always appealed to those in power, while the craft that occurs in everyday life has been frowned upon by the same people.

As a result of the constant search for the exotic and exclusive, the European gaze moved from its own sphere towards "The New World", as it was referred to by the Eurocentric. What these eyes saw and what their hands took, formed the first Wunderkammer in Europe. Exotism developed as a method to understand European identity in relation to the exotic: "the other" as a speculative counterpart.

The students of the Research Lab course this year have in different ways approached the magnificent collection displayed at the Chinese Pavilion. The remarkable collection is a result of Queen Ulrika Lovisa's diligent collecting of Chinese and Japanese objects: objects shaped by Western perceptions of remote places.

Approaching a collection of this kind from our own artistic practices enables us to investigate, discuss and understand contemporary perceptions of exotism in relation to our own world views. There is a specific privilege to art; through the making and the

artistic focal points speculative models can be created, where questions can be investigated freely and experimented with in ways that differ from scientifically-oriented research. The artist can reveal what is in the periphery of the narratives of history. Points of view that allow us to observe ourselves and the present from a historical root system: not a linear perspective that turns history into a passive given, but a perspective where observation makes history become active.

The unique collections at the Chinese Pavilion are activated through a dialogue with the artists' materials, actions and makings. During access to the collections at the Chinese Pavilion, conservators, curators and on-site staff generously shared their knowledge in order to create the best conditions for artistic interventions. I am very grateful to have had the privilege as a supervisor to follow the development of artistic mirroring.

I am also very grateful to the artists. With care and courage they approached the collections to listen to their stories of place, colonial perceptions of exotism, materiality, craft, impacts of time, and a collector who bought these things together into a narrative that tells also of our own time.

**Anders Ljungberg**

*Professor of Craft, specialising in  
Jewellery and Corpus,*

*Konstfack, University of Arts, Crafts and Design*









# Some Other Swedes

SEBASTIAN HÄGELSTAM

THE CHINESE PAVILION came to serve as a private sphere in the otherwise official lives of the royal family. A place where they could relax in the tranquillity of being alone with the closest members of the court. What could fit better to render this refuge than the exotic dream of Asia that had been imprinted in the Western mind the last century.

Today, the Chinese Pavilion is static. A documentation of a different time with different views on the world. Left are buildings, the items, the art and the craft. Collections containing Chinese and Japanese porcelain, lacquer works, wall paintings, mirror paintings, clay figurines, furniture and numerous other objects that emphasize this dream of Asia.

The exteriors and interiors of the Chinese Pavilion compose a European misconception of Asian, and foremost Chinese, culture that fitted an escapist narrative. As a visitor to the castle, one is given somewhat of a power position, looking at objects lined up and being exhibited as something exotic and other. My work starts with this concept of the other, focusing

on the elaborate collection of figurines in various materials that through their positioning depict people and cultures as exotic. Most of the figurines are installed on different shelves along or up against the walls, all lined up and grinning at the visitors. I want to emphasize the absurdity of the gaze the visitors are given and the underlying power relations by turning the gaze inwards towards Swedish culture.

Approaching the Pavilion through the allegorical figurines on the fireplace in the Red Room, I have created a set of figurines that depict Swedes with the same exotifying gaze as their equals in the Pavilion. My figurines resemble Swedes whom I have never met or seen other than through pop culture such as the movie *Sällskapsresan*, yet they capture my prejudiced picture of Swedish manners and identity. Swedes from an era that seems distant to me yet exists parallel to my reality. They do not necessarily represent the common Swede, yet they make up what I think of them. Swedes that to me seem to be as other as the rest of their company in the silent rooms of the Chinese Pavilion.



SCULPTED AND CAST STONEWARE, UNDERGLAZE, GOLD LUSTER





# Lantern Well

ÅSA ANDERSSON

DURING A VISIT to the Chinese Pavilion in September 2020, Matt Smith said "... the lanterns are so fragile they will fall apart if you blow on them." This phrase stuck with Åsa Andersson as she became mesmerized by the painted, translucent textile lanterns suspended from the ceiling of the Yellow Gallery. Stored in the basement are fairytale-like large lanterns in metal and glass for outdoor use.

The Chinese Pavilion is the result of a desire to build in order to manifest another kind of space while harbouring complexities of appropriation. Aesthetically, there is an "unruly" cultural mixing that emerges along the Pavilion's delicate sounds of bells. Fragments of dreamy, magical landscapes flourish among its interior décor. Perhaps, clear-fell in the woods also appears?

On the second floor, there is the Library with its pink "rice paper" walls, fixed green bookcases with gold lists, which echo the colours of the exterior of the Chinese Pavilion. There is an abundance of porcelain figurines, lucky gods, and a large, as if laughing, doll. Another feature is the tall black cabinet made in Sweden for the first "Kinahuset" by carpenter Friedrich Kruus and lacquer by Jacob Lilljedahl in 1755. This unit can be pulled apart, and changed from an inert shelf housing figurines, to a writing desk, a kind of *work bench*, for possible action.

Influenced by the idea of agency and creative joy, Åsa Andersson has used a figure saw to make a partly re-configured and enlarged model of a Chinese Lantern found in the "do it yourself" handbook, *Lövsågning*, by Edith Holstrup (1976). This is an example of how traces of China and Japan have reached Sweden through trade, travel reports and art over centuries, impacting on the designs of folk craft and domestic woodwork. To cut 2–3 mm aircraft plywood requires attention and mistakes and cracks provide immediate feedback in a tactile learning process.

Åsa Andersson's *Lantern Well* lights up the library and also picks up motifs from the François Boucher influenced wall paintings (possibly by John Pach) and a fish bowl in porcelain in the Green Salon on the ground floor. A Japanese tea master should each morning draw fresh water from a well to be prepared to offer tea during the day. What would it mean to every morning draw light?

BIRCH PLYWOOD WITH WATERCOLOUR, CRAYONS AND COLOUR PENCILS, WOODCUT PRINT ON MULBERRY PAPER, BAMBOO WATER LADLE (HISHAKU), GLASS, LIGHT FIXTURE





# Gratia Scientia

KRISTIN LARSSON

DURING THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT the previous God-given power of the royal courts around Europe decreased as a result of democratizations in society and increased confidence in science. For Queen Lovisa Ulrika, the loss of power was probably particularly noticeable when, as a result of her marriage to the Swedish king Adolf Fredrik in 1744, she moved from the authoritarian monarchy of Prussia to the more or less government-ruled Sweden.

During her time as the Swedish queen, Lovisa Ulrika tried to implement a coup to regain royal power. Lovisa Ulrika's plan to finance the coup was to pawn the diamonds from her crown. The diamonds were secretly exchanged with crystal replicas in order to not arouse any suspicion. The coup failed, but there are other ways to gain power.

Throughout her life, Lovisa Ulrika surrounded herself with some of the foremost artists, writers, philosophers and scientists of her time, including Voltaire and Carl von Linné. Linné even helped her organize her natural history collection, which later became the base for the collections at the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm.

The Queen's collection of "naturalia" can be read as an expression of social and cultural supremacy. In her possession, these objects do not only talk about nature or history, they also testify to Lovisa Ulrika's relationship to that knowledge. As a collector she owned it and controlled the narrative. With each object, a claim was made, not only to the matter that

the object constitutes, but also to the history that the object tells. The same kind of prerogative takes place through the construction of the Chinese Pavilion. The Pavilion can be compared to a cultural curiosity cabinet where a constructed truth is presented, a performance of the exotic and oriental.

The power of the rulers used to be at the mercy of God. When that mandate began to fail, Lovisa Ulrika turned to society's new church: Science. Through the grace of knowledge she sought the mandate to rule over truths, took the power to interpret and arrange.

*Gratia Scientia* is an artifact and royal regalia. A symbol that testifies to the Queen's mandate to tell her subjects about the world. Seen from one angle, it is a monument of superiority, adorned with magnificent objects; shells, fossils and minerals shine like diamonds in a crown. But from another angle, it is glass that plays the role of the diamond in this majestic piece.



BLOWN, SCULPTED AND COLD WORKED GLASS. RECYCLED GLASS SHARDS, WELDED RECYCLED ELECTRIC COPPER CORDS, CAST RECYCLED PEWTER, TIFFANY TECHNIQUE, SILICONE, SHEET GLASS









# Pjäs

CECILIA LEVY

AT FIRST SIGHT THE CHINESE PAVILION is dazzling. The huge amount of objects, details, and colour is quite overwhelming. Upon entry, one is suddenly struck by the immense stillness inside. You move slowly and gracefully through the rooms, careful not to accidentally touch anything. It's difficult to imagine the doors to the garden suddenly flung wide open, the curtains caught in a breeze, the rooms filled with movement, the soft rustle of silk fabric, sounds of footsteps and voices from another time.

The Green Salon was a room for activity and human interaction. It was furnished accordingly, depending on the activity for the day. The queen could listen to readings, the crown prince would draw, the princesses would do needlework, meals could be served here or game tables set up. Outwardly, life must have seemed light-hearted and noble. But it was a regulated fantasy, scheduled and strictly directed like a theatrical play. Intrigues and conspiracies took place behind backs – secrecy and events which affected many people.

The floor of the Green Salon is checkered, with a little imagination it can be seen like a game plan or chess board. Two large Chinese papier mâché dolls observe silently from the far end of the room, in the marbled corner niches. Beneath the smooth white surface of their faces lay hidden traces from earlier generations, embedded in layers of waste material, paper, and glue.

In January 2021, reports came of the attack on the U.S. Capitol building, an attempted coup on democracy. News media overflowed with reports and images. As if the past year with the Corona virus wasn't enough, a sudden, involuntary connection to Lovisa Ulrika's failed coup attempt in 1756 became apparent.

Processing the unfolding events, the bad news gradually transformed into working material. The pages from the morning paper, with images of rioting people, looting and vandalizing, were shredded into long, thin strips in the shredding machine, then soaked in water and finally mixed into a grey pulp. Together with a few other ingredients, a paper clay was produced. The mixture was then applied onto shapes and forms built in layered papier mâché technique, adding a tangible layer from the historic event.

Some have painted faces, just like the Chinese dolls. Several layers of gofun, finely ground oyster shells mixed with rabbit skin glue, then sanded and polished until the the surface shimmered.

Slowly, surely, characters evolved.

Silent observers, in dialogue with each other, with history. Making a scene within the stillness.

RECYCLED GRAY CARDBOARD, WALLPAPER PASTE, FILLER, BABY OIL, FLOUR,  
DAGENS NYHETER 8-10TH OF JANUARY 2021, GOFUN POWDER, RABBIT SKIN GLUE





# Witness/Witnesses I–VIII

FRIDA LINDBERG

*... and there they were; the unseen,  
the caretakers,  
the enablers.  
Standing there were the Witnesses,  
they had been there all along.*

FRIDA LINDBERG OFFERS a new perspective on the Chinese Pavilion where objects that are meant to be unseen are given a new role. The pavilion's rich color scheme has inspired Lindberg to make still-life compositions of different angles of the space, where the everyday objects that are installed to take care of the pavilion have been included in the composition. By shifting the gaze of the viewer, new questions arise. How do we create value in objects and what do we exclude from our gaze? Whose history is not yet written?

With the act of weaving, Lindberg has given these objects care. The unseen has been given time and attention by interpreting the compositions into weaves. Weaving as an artistic method enables the artist to create the surface along with the composition. The different colored yarn, visually mixed to create a new color, still retains its original characteristics. This creates a diverse and complex surface, slowly woven by hand – inlay by inlay, demanding the artist to stay with the subject (and with oneself).

The smaller weaves *Witnesses I–VIII*, woven as color memories of the space, are placed throughout the pavilion as an indicator to shift the viewers' gaze. The larger weave *Witness*, placed in the Blue Salon, is an in-depth investigation of what it is to stay with something. The still-life photograph of the fire extinguisher, in dialogue with the Chinese urn as depicted, has been the starting point. Throughout the weaving process the composition has dissolved to the abstract, similar to the smaller weaves, a journey between two worlds.

HAND-WOVEN WEAVES IN WOOL, LINEN AND GOLD THREAD





# Good Luck Wishes

KRISTINA LUNDSJÖ

THE KITE IS AN OBJECT that has its origin in China. It later spread over the world, with each culture developing their own different designs. At the time when the Chinese Pavilion was built, the kite was commonly used as a toy in Europe. As a toy it was just used for pure joy. Whether the royal family at this time ever flew kites is not certain, but there was the possibility to do so. What is certain is that the Chinese Pavilion was a place where they spent their summer days. A place where they could escape their life at the Drottningholm Palace. In the project *Good Luck Wishes* the kite works as a symbol for this escape, and for summer. It represents a dream of a carefree life and the playfulness of the Rococo era.

The work is exhibited in the Yellow Gallery, a room with many doors that once stood open, letting inside and outside meet. The solid-coloured wall panels were once decorated with paintings, but they were removed during an early restoration. *Good Luck Wishes* is an attempt to decorate them again.

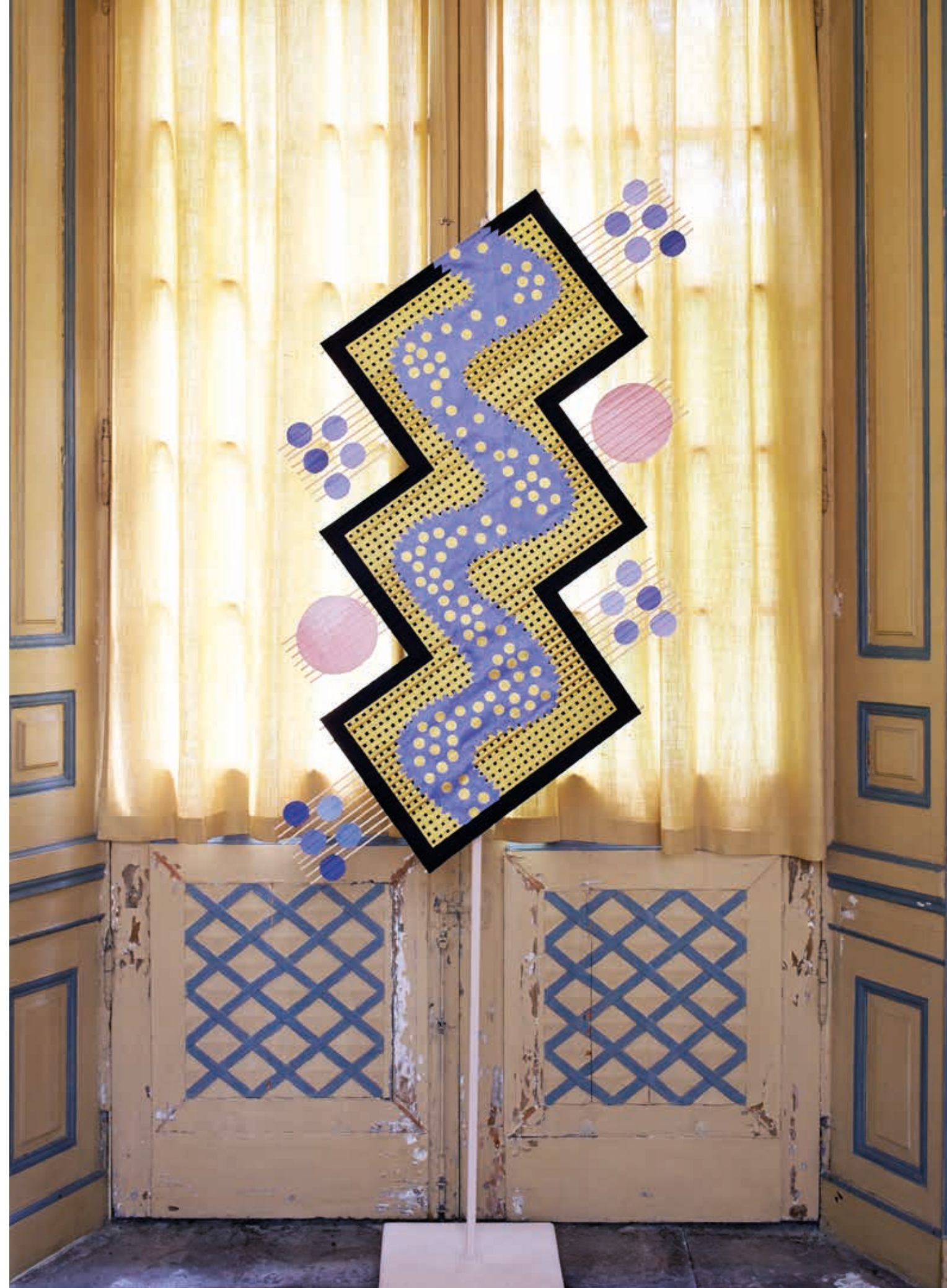
Lundsjö's research process for the project has included making small versions of traditional kites, learning by doing, shaping bamboo and tying knots. The work exhibited borrows shapes from both Chinese and Japanese versions. But the focus has also been experiments with the kite more as a free shape and construction. It is an exploration of how to use bamboo constructions as collage method, and a way of assembling different fabrics. The bamboo sticks work as skeletons carrying textiles.

The objects are made by mixing ingredients found in the Pavilion. They are playing with eclecticism, a combination of different styles and traditions. Materials and colours are translated into the work: bamboo, lacquer, silk, gold, Paris blue. Steps are taken from imitation to association and inspiration.

During the pandemic the kite has become an almost too clear metaphor for feelings of hope and despair. It has not flown and cannot fly, only in our imagination.



BAMBOO, DYED AND PRINTED SILK, COTTON AND LACQUER FABRICS





# Chapdi: one amongst Lac

SAMEEKSHA MEHRA

THE LACQUER SCREEN in the Blue Drawing Room is an exquisite example of the European fascination with Chinese lacquerware. This six-fold screen in Coromandel lacquer is one of the objects that were imported from China. True to the Coromandel lacquer style, this screen has a dark wood base topped with decorative pictures in gold on one side and red on the other. Lacquer, native to Asia, was a mysterious material in Europe which heightened the desirability of lacquerware. Lacquerware from China was hence one of the chief imports to Europe during the 17th and the 18th centuries.

Lacquer has been used in the Asian subcontinent for millenia. In India, the indigenous lacquer (Lac) even finds mention in ancient religious mythology from four thousand years ago. The versatility of Lac is evident from its usage across handicraft, medicine, agriculture, and many more. In the craft field, Lac is often applied over base materials (usually wood or metal) for protection and ornamentation purposes.

In western India, Lac bangle-making is a traditional craft where craftsmen (karigars) use raw Lac to craft bangles in striking colors. The knowledge and skills of the craft are usually passed down through generations as the karigars learn the craft by watching the seniors in the family. Today, global capitalistic trends continue to disrupt inherited skills and the heritage Lac economy rooted in local traditions. Karigars, their craft and their sleepy tuck shops on the street side are diminishing as a result, now faster than ever.

The Lac craft in India is relatively unexplored, with limited research and few historical records. Sameeksha Mehra is researching the history of Lac and how it can be made relevant in a contemporary context. Mehra's work in the Chinese Pavilion is a part of this ongoing research, where she has collaborated with the Lac karigars in India to learn and create pieces that go beyond the traditional usage of Lac in the region. Inspired by the lacquer work in the Chinese Pavilion her showcase displays experiments with lacquer in its various forms.



INDIAN LACQUER





# Hold

VILDA KVIST

GREAT LOVE AND PROFOUND GRIEF have affected people's lives throughout history. It is a never-ending theme that ties people together through time and space. The Chinese Pavilion was bestowed as a gift upon Queen Lovisa Ulrika who lost her firstborn in 1745. During the 18th century one in four children did not survive their first year. In Sweden today, there are still 700 children every year who do not live to experience their first birthday.

The love and grief for a lost child leave an indelible imprint for life. This is an experience shared by the historic queen Lovisa Ulrika and the contemporary artist Vilda Kvist. It binds two women together regardless of the distance in time and context. *Hold* is created to celebrate the edge between love and grief. It is an artwork for those living with the experience of having lost a beloved child. This is not an unusual experience, however, in modern times it is rarely portrayed in art.

How is it possible to continue to exist as a human being when you are thrown into the deepest grief at the same time as you have received the greatest love in your arms? Vilda Kvist has explored symbols of mourning and their purpose. Based on thoughts and interpretations of mourning clothing, mourning ribbons and veils; small ceramic pieces have emerged and been assembled into a blanket, into an armour,

into something that can hide, cover and protect. In the Oval Room where the surviving children of Lovisa Ulrika used to play, the armour or blanket unrolls and expands.

The artwork was initially facing outwards to protect the grieving from the outside world and communicating the grief. As the creative process progressed, the work turned to a desire to express an inner need and the inner structure of a life-changing love. Jaques Werup writes in the poem Envoi:

*I have experienced you. I can never lose you. \**

In the Oval Room, the playroom of the royal children, and high up in the trees of the palace garden, swings made of crystal glass hang. Unreachable but yet constantly present. The body knows how it feels to experience a swing. Kvist seeks to combine and weave together a brutal present without the child, with the constant ever present love for him. At the same time Kvist attempts to create a space for the grief of Lovisa Ulrika and other parents who share her experience.

*Hold* is a project that continues. Until 700 swings are made and installed across the country.

*\* Translation by the artist*

KILN CAST GLASS, REDUCTION- AND OXIDATION FIRED  
PORCELAIN AND STONEWARE, STEEL AND METAL WIRE





# The Order of the Great Empire of Things

EVA SKÄRLUND

THE ORDER OF THE GREAT EMPIRE OF THINGS is a universal order that has always existed alongside man's interest in things. The criterion for being elected to this society is that you are surrounded by things, far too many things.

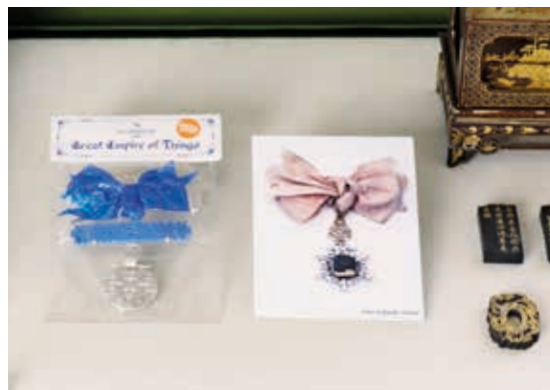
*Things you do not need*  
*Things you do not know why you bought*  
*Things you forgot you owned*

The insignia currently consists of a silver-framed blue 3D print of the word things and a silver medallion with a Chinese symbol of happiness. The sign is worn in a blue bow in woven plastic on the left side of the chest. The motto of the order is "Vincere Pluribus" (most things win).

Eva Skärlund's work is a combination of research on the ancient human interest in objects, the pattern of consumption in today's society and the fascination for the selected and exclusive. At the Chinese Pavilion there is a precious collection of exotic Asian objects. The Pavilion and the collection can be seen as a form of royal props purchased, for instance through the East India Company, to elevate and enhance the royal splendour. For luxury to have a function and a value, it must be displayed, for example through a collection. If we look at objects as a way of telling the outside world who we are, it becomes important that they are clearly coded with a message that those around us can understand.

Sweden is still a market for Asian imports. However, the conditions are a bit different. The import used to be the height of luxury and only accessible for a few. Today "Made in China" is available to all and dominated by low prices and questionable quality. We look at the desire for things in different ways. On one hand, it is seen as a positive, emotionally-charged source of joy and excitement. While on the other hand, it can be interpreted as a negative concept associated with anxiety, lack of control and addiction.

In 1744, princess Lovisa Ulrika instituted The Order of Unity. It was a very exclusive order given only to 22 people. The purpose of the distribution was to tie the inner circle closer and to reward loyalty. Eva Skärlund has also instituted an order, *The Order of the Great Empire of Things*. Unlike the Order of Unity, this order is available to a wider public.



SILVER, PLASTIC, TRADITIONAL GOLDSMITHING TECHNIQUES, 3D PRINTING AND VACUUM FORMING













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Big Image

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