

Shadows of possibilities

The things we are given
and The things we choose

Project Report

Bachelor Project (F24)

Say Min



[MIN Say, Crafts in Glass & Ceramics]

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1. Introduction

To end my studies at the Royal Danish Academy with the Bachelor project, it felt appropriate to include the story of how I started my studies here and the things I have learned along the way. It all began when I got curious about how someone becomes right-handed or left-handed. Are we born to it? Or do we develop a prominent hand?

Then, I turned to my sister. She was born left-handed, but since most things are right-hand centered such as scissors, she developed both hands to operate actively. Though in the particular case of right or left-handedness, external factors play a greater role in the decisions we make from what we are given – this got me thinking about how independent/autonomous we can be and how powerful choice can be within the situations we are given with.

Just like everybody else, as a kid growing up, the place where you live and who you meet is not controlled by me. I grew up moving to different countries and cities almost every three to four years, so developing this skill to see the better side of any given situation became an indispensable instrument in life and the decisive factor that led me to this education.

It could be summarized by the subtitle of this project: 'the things we are given and the things we choose'. I chose to use shadowgraphy (as in the performing art) to illustrate and visualize how one thing or situation is full of possibilities with how it can be understood and interpreted. Depending on the angle of your hand and light, the same hand posture can project drastically different shadow shapes on the wall. A perfect fit for my project as it is simple in the visualization, but is capable of carrying the concept of the project as it is easily understandable through our shared experience from childhood of playing around with shadow shapes.

Although the project began with a 'full of life', spreading positivity implications, it gained depth when I recognized the paradox of having so many possibilities. Realizing the diverse possibilities that a thing can carry could mean that we have the power and authority to choose and lead our own lives, but on the other hand, the possibilities could burden us as we realize the responsibility that follows with the choices we make. Here, the use of shadowgraphy and shadow works as a metaphor to hint at the paradoxical nature of possibilities, both its positive and challenging aspects of it.

Through research into my personal life, theory, and different ceramic qualities, I unfold "the things we are given and the things we choose" through ceramics as my medium.



Here is the research question:

How can I create a dynamic sculpture made in ceramics to illustrate the multifacetedness of possibilities and our ability to choose?

2. Research

The research for this project can be divided into two big categories. One is heavily focused on the concept through the research of tracing back to how my research question was applied in my life before the start of this study and during the studies. The other is the theoretical part of the project regarding sculptural quality and the material quality of ceramics. The combination of these researches brought clarity and allowed the kick-off of the method of the body of work for this project.

2.1. Possibility! & Shadows...

Possibility!

Before KADK

The first higher education study I took on was a Bachelors of European Law in the Netherlands. I chose the studies because I still was not sure about what I wanted to do as a career and was fairly interested in law. European law was interesting like how any other education can be interesting, but it progressively got clearer that I was not passionate about it. I was lost. On top of that, the duration of my studies was caught in between the corona period. With everything processed online, there was no physical community within my previous university. No passion and no one to confide in. The situation 'I was given' seemed stuck and depressive. It seemed like that was the only way to perceive the situation. But then I had a revelation about how there is another way to perceive this situation. The objective truth of the situation is that the current education was not something I am passionate about and that there was no support structure within the education. I could passively accept the situation and just try to survive my way through my studies, but I realized that I was not at all powerless in that situation. Passive acceptance was also an active choice of how I was going to perceive the situation. In the equivalent capacity, I was capable of actively choosing to



perceive the same situation in another way. I could actively accept the situation and go the other way. This is when I asked myself ‘What if I actually die tomorrow?’. I still wanted to study, but it was definitely not going to be European Law. Without too much careful consideration of a list of pros and cons, I decided that ceramics could be something I would enjoy studying. The next day, I stopped my studies for European Law and started my application process here at the Royal Danish Academy. This was the first major moment when I recognized the power of ‘choice’ within what is ‘given’ to us.

Shadows...

During KADK

As a result of starting the professional bachelors of Crafts in Glass & Ceramics at the Royal Danish Academy, I moved out from the Netherlands to Bornholm, Denmark. An island that I had never heard of in my life, an island where there was absolutely no one that I could recognize. Completely isolated and independent. This is a place that marks a new chapter in my life because this is where I became completely independent environmentally and financially. What followed from being independent and entering a step deeper into adulthood was that every decision I made gradually became heavier as my responsibility became greater. Having so many possibilities meant that the resulting outcome heavily depended on what kind of choice I made. IF the results came back negative, having the power of ‘choice’ within what is ‘given’ to us meant that there is less and less of an external factor that we can blame things on, and more of finding the reasons for failure inwards. Making it harder to tolerate oneself, the power of ‘choice’ becomes a burden.

2.2. Sculpture in ceramics

Here, I dive into two texts (Adamson, 2007) (Grathwol, Ørskov, 1998). These two texts were referred to when researching different elements of sculptural work that I could apply to this project. Questions such as What am I aiming for from a sculpture and What kind of elements of a sculpture should be considered when materializing the research question.

Aim

why sculpture

One idea prominently caught my attention from the book by Glenn Adamson. This idea conceives sculpture as a “many-sided painting”. Through the example of Anthony Caro’s monumental 1962 sculpture ‘*Early One Morning*’, Adamson successfully illustrates how a three-dimensional sculpture can offer a new visual configuration. As the viewer orbits the sculpture, they are met with a powerful visual experience of the sculpture, in a fleeting moment, flattening and transforming itself into a picture. One sculpture could also be seen as “a progression of discontinuous images that one gains by orbiting the sculpture” (Adamson, 2007). As the project moved forward, I constantly referred back to this understanding of the



function of a sculptural work. Especially when exploring options for display and how I can maximize this visual experience of the “many-sided painting”, which befits the concept of this project about how one thing can be viewed in many-folded ways.

Sculpture

how sculpture

Grathwol and Ørskov brilliantly list out elements of a sculpture in their attempt to give a more concrete definition of what a sculpture is. Throughout this project, I frequently referred to this book as an encyclopedia for sculptural works. I would refer to this book to understand how different sculptural elements can influence the work. Some of the elements that were paid attention to are light and shadow, tactile attraction through the material, and weight and density of the material. Understanding how these elements work with sculptures, and understanding what I should look out for or what I should accentuate became clearer to me. Another significant understanding from this book concerns the organization of sculpture, more specifically the rhythm of sculpture. It talks about the rhythm of sculpture and provides a new definition called the “dynamic sculpture”.

“When standing in front of a dynamic sculpture, our rhythmic experience is expanded to include a bodily experience; the experience of the sculpture does not manifest itself until we have moved around it, towards it, in changing tempos during the movement.”

(Grathwol, Ørskov, 1998 pg. 31)

The research question of this project started with the phrase ‘interactive scene’, but it was not quite there. It was missing the tactile aspect of experiencing the ceramic work. On the contrary, the dynamic – the recurring rhythm – is closer to what I aim for this project as it embodies the bodily, and tactile experience. Grathwol and Ørskov provided me with the tools to understand the mechanisms that are in place for sculptures and refined the research question of this project.

3. Method

Choosing and executing the method of making is an entirely independent research on its own. Here I research shape, and surface expression through 2D sketches, shadow sketching, and more.

3.1. Shape & Form

Part I : The subject

To begin my investigation into shapes and forms, I returned to the first inspiration of this project; hands. As it was getting clearer that I would use shadowgraphy to visualize the concept, I wanted to focus on finding concrete shapes to balance out the heavily conceptual part of the project. *Figures 1.1-2* are my own shape investigations and from this I found



Figure 1.1 Palm shape



Figure 1.1 Palm shape



Figure 1.3 imperfect curves



Figure 1.4 beautiful and functional curves

some interesting shapes. When visualizing these shapes, I also referred to my background as a South Korean. Curves, more specifically imperfect curves are celebrated throughout the art history of Korea (*figures 1.3 -4*). Thus combining the celebration of asymmetrical curves

and the shapes discovered from the palm shape research, I arrived at pebble-like shapes that look like it is appearing out of the ground (*figures 2.1 -2*)

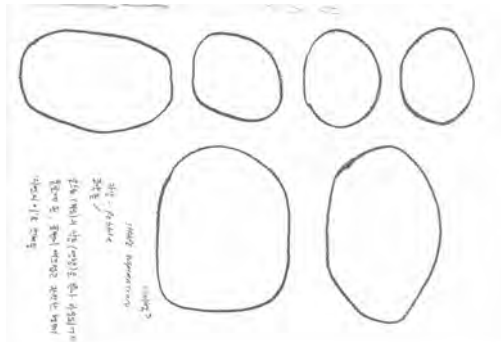


Figure 2.1 'pebbles'



Figure 2.2 'pebble' test tile, for shape reference

Part II : 'The things we are given'

Within the different elements of shadowgraphy, to convey 'the things we are given', the actual hand shape that allows the projection of shadows was investigated. Although I could easily translate the shape from sketches to modeling in ceramics by literally using the hand shapes that formed the shadow shape, I wanted to make it less figurative and more abstract. During the shape research, I explored figurative shapes as well (*figure 3.1-3*), but the final shape will be closer to *Figures 4.1-3*. By making the shape more abstract, I aim to avoid



Figure 3.1 'First line of experiment -



Figure 3.2. ""-figurative



Figure 3.3 ""-figurative



Figure 4.1 'Second' line of experiment - abstract



Figure 4.2 'Third' line I

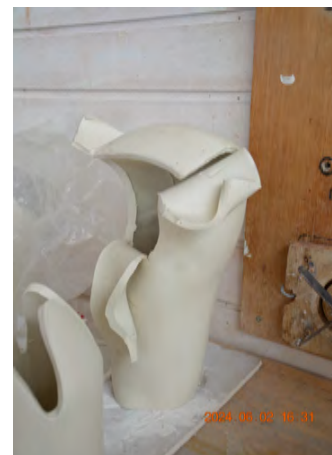


Figure 4.3 'Third' line II

depicting any specific topic of discussion and stimulate imagination. The 'things we are given' will be mounted on top of the 'pebble' with the shadow shape drawings, indicating where the shadow shapes are originating from.

Part III : 'The things we choose'

Here, the different shadow shapes were investigated and translated into drawings on 'Part I : The Subject'. I began experimenting with shadow making as seen in figures 5.1-4. They were then drawn in the sketchbook with the hand shape that created the shadow shape to try and connect it to 'Part II : 'The things we are given' ', figure 6.



Figure 5.1 'M1' shadow



Figure 5.3 'M2' shadow



Figure 5.2 'M1' shadow shape - distorted



Figure 5.4 'M2' shadow shape - distorted



Figure 6 overview of the 'M' hand & shadow shape

After trying out different shapes, I realized that I wanted a shape that meant something to me. A pause to shadow shape investigation and more brainstorming. I then arrived in the final shape (figure 7). This shape is called Bornholm. During my time here, I recognized that there are in general two different ways that people perceive Bornholm.

One is the Sunshine Island. Peaceful, nature-friendly, close neighbors, tight community, and a place of rest and serenity. The other is isolation. Trapped, slow, local, and limited. With hand shape B(ornholm), I could express the sun (figure 7.1) symbolizing the sunshine island and with the same hand shape, I could express a distorted shape that looks like a cage (figure 7.3) symbolizing the isolated island. Hand shape B can be seen in Figure 8.

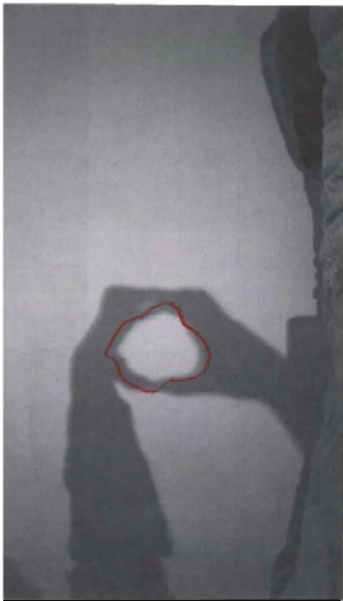


Figure 7.1 'B1' shadow shape



Figure 7.3 'B2' shadow



Figure 7.2 'B1' shadow shape - distorted



Figure 7.4 'B2' shadow shape - distorted

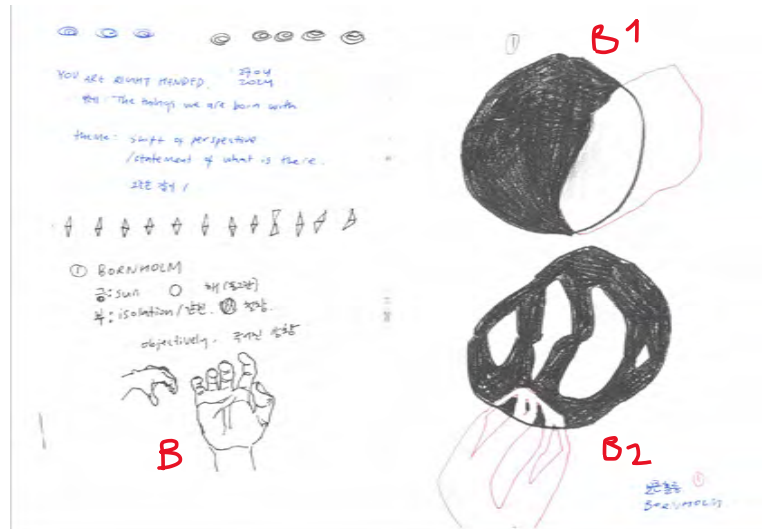


Figure 8 overview of the 'B' hand & shadow shape

Now that the shape was finalized, I researched how the shape could be transferred onto 'Part I : The Subject', the pebbles. Each shape comes in two parts. The more massive, coloured-in part (black coloured drawing in figure 8) and the linear traced drawing part (red line drawing in figure 8). Figure 9.1-2 shows my



Figure 9.1 - small brush



Figure 9.2 - rubber rib



Figure 9.3 - tool variation

investigation process for the massive part of the drawing, variation is brought by using (figure 9.3) to apply the white For the linear traced part, I am

technique called inlay. Figure 10 is a test piece that displays what the drawings look on the

where the diverse tools porcelain slip. using a



Figure 10 - test piece on actual shape

actual surface of a 'pebble'. This was developed further along the process by highlighting the overlap of the different shadows.

3.2. Surface expression

Two main areas were investigated.

The first one is about the blåler slip. At the beginning of the project, I was fixed on the idea that I did not want any sort of glaze on the piece. To me, glaze is a very conscious choice, which I could not find the reason for in this project. Hence, in the beginning, I tested out how the different firing temperatures could change the expression of the clay (*figure 11*). Although I wanted to deny it, unglazed high-fired surface expression was killing the liveliness of the clay. This was a problem because, at this point, I knew that the 'dynamic sculpture' I mentioned in the research question, was also going to include a tactile experience for the viewer to touch and sit on.

Therefore, this attractiveness to touch became an important element, which the unglazed surface was not giving. I then tested gas-fired reduction, but the surface was bubbling up too much even in this tiny test scale (*figure 12*). Whilst I was caught in a dilemma, the shared workshop space at school was what resolved it. Through a healthy discussion of exchange of knowledge with others in the workshop, I decided to test out blåler (earthenware) slip (*figure 13*). It connected to the project instantly, as it could finish the look

of the form naturally. As the clay slip melts in the kiln, it blends and melts into the clay form and creates a natural hue rather than a general glaze layer that melts within itself, but not necessarily fuse with the clay underneath. Naturality was



Figure 11 - no glaze, variance in firing temperature



Figure 12 - no glaze, reduction gas fired



Figure 13 - test for blåler earthenware slip applied and high fired

something I was keeping in mind because the project revolves around stories of life and all processes leading up to this point had an organic starting point such as the shape and form investigations. In the same line of thought, the second part of surface expression I focused on is texture.

surface texture
smooth and
more I reflected
realized that it
tactile attraction
returned to my
about the
imperfect
this in mind, I
small dents into
the pieces,



Figure 14 - surface texture

The initial
was completely
round. The
upon it, I
lacked that
for touch. So, I
inspiration
beauty in
curves. Keeping
started to tab
the surface of
which

eventually covered up the whole surface area (figure 14). This one detail brought real-life reactions from the workshop of people telling me how the texture makes them want to touch the piece and asking my permission to do so.

3.3. Other makers in the field

The three makers that I paid close attention to are; Claudi Casanovas (figure 15), Saelia Aparicio (figure 16), and Reinaldo Sanguino (figure 17). Their works encouraged me to critically reflect on the role of form, surface expression of texture, and drawings.



Figure 16 - Saelia Aparicio, *Ek*, 2020



Figure 15 - Claudi Casanovas, *Pedrets*, 2019



Figure 17 - Reinaldo Sanguino, *ceramic stools*

4. Display

Ceramics occupies real space. It becomes real as an experience, an interaction. Through the discussions held with professors and peers, the display evolved over time. The big question that I have asked myself throughout the process of deciding on display was 'What is the appropriate amount of experience for the audience?'. Here, I focus on what the quantity of a body of work could add to the research question and on what other medium such as a podium could benefit the project.

4.1. How many?

In the beginning, I followed the initial shape investigation without thinking too much. So the initial plan was to have nine different 'pebbles'; four from the palm and five of them surrounding the four- representing our fingertips (*figure 18*). After questioning myself about what significance the palm had in my project, I reduced the amount to six in total. The shapes



Figure 18 - initial display sketch

from the palm was continued for the form language to recognize the initial inspiration, however having the whole palm arrangement was not going to add any merit to achieve what I conceptually aim for in this project.

Therefore, dismantling the palm shape in all, I arrived at having three pieces in total. As mentioned briefly in '3.2 Surface Expression', I aim to make a dynamic sculpture that could provide a rich opportunity to experience the sculptural works not only visually by observing the works by moving around/ towards it/ and changing tempos during the movement but also through the sensuality of

touching and feeling the work, of its surface texture and being able to interact with the work more directly by pausing and sitting on the piece.

Since the project aims to convey the multifacetedness of possibilities, I wanted to provide more angles to view the piece. This is why I made the conscious decision to only draw shadow shapes on one piece and the two other pieces will act as equivalently significant, but supporting pieces that are meant to be seated on. The arrangement helps to simplify visual stimulation and guides the audience's focus, (*figure 19*).



Figure 19 - Final arrangement visualization

4.2. Other medium?

When thinking about the installation, different elements of other mediums were taken into consideration, such as having spotlights to dictate light and shadow, having switches for the audience to play around with choosing the angle of the light and thus observing how their choice of light effects the shadow shape protruding from the abstract figure on the middle piece, and finally about having podiums. Regarding light and shadow, this could be a further development that I could work on, but for this project, I am confining myself with how many more elements to add to the installation. Having actual light to create shadow shapes that will overlap with the already overlapping shadow shape illustrations could possibly create a confusing visual experience. Furthermore, I do like the idea of having the switches for the spotlights as an interactive component where the audience can actually alter the visual experience, but this again could easily become a distraction that takes the focus away from the piece and what it is conveying. Through different theoretical explorations and discussions with others, I decided not to include artificial lighting. An advantage of this decision is the broadening and the opening of possibilities of where I can picture this body of work to be displayed. Without needing a strict studio or gallery setting, the works could easily benefit from outdoor environments like parks and become more available to the public.



After deciding on having three pieces as the body of work, it became clear to me that a podium would be needed for the middle piece. The two supporting pieces are meant to be seated by viewers, hence not having podiums for these two pieces would lower the bar for the viewer to approach and hopefully incite them to have a seat. On the other hand, the middle piece is meant to be looked at when rhythmically going around the dynamic piece and when being seated on the ceramic stools. Hence, it made sense to have a podium that would elevate the piece from the ground. Which would hopefully also create a bigger difference and dynamic between the eye-sight level of being seated and walking around the pieces. Furthermore, it made sense for the podium to be in wood, varnished, but not painted. This was because throughout the project, naturality and materiality have been an important element to highlight for the viewers to feel closer to the works and feel safe for them to physically interact with the pieces as well. Thus, choosing the podium's materiality to be visible, cooperates with the overall aesthetic decisions that were made.

4.3. Modeling the final pieces

These are some of the process photos and final looks of the works.







5. Conclusion and Perspective

To conclude, this Bachelor project has been a rollercoaster ride. This was the fourth project proposal as I was in constant doubt about what is just good as an idea and what is worth making. As I look back at the thought process of how this project conceptually came alive, it reflects who I am as a maker and who I am as a person, which I longed for as it is the biggest research question that encompasses all research questions from all projects. More specifically about this project, despite the research question being heavily conceptual, I believe that the materiality of clay and craftsmanship did not get lost. They were slowly unraveled one by one, a step at a time. I cannot say about the result, but I can say that every step of the process points back to the research question and was kept grounded by it.

One of the things I would like to work further on is understanding size. As I lack experience with making ceramic works to be seated on, I want to learn from this experience and further develop ways of making ceramic seatings. Another project-specific development would be playing around with light. Unfortunately for this project, I had to suspend that element as I would not have been able to find a good middle ground of including artificial light without it being a distraction to the display. However I am still intrigued by the idea of the audience



having a say in directing the angle of light and thus the shape of the shadow. All in all, it has been an exciting journey of brainstorming and making, and hopefully this project's display will be enjoyed by many during the exhibition tour.



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