Most Ghosts Hold Grudges
Bridges in the rivers. Huge craters on both sides of the rails, junkyards of dead war machinery.

Only the small towns are still there. Hannover, Kassel, Giessen, Würzburg: completely levelled, gone.

The trains are overcrowded with German refugees. They are going home. Some of them. Others, they are searching for home. They are just going. Anywhere, no matter where, like us. Some carry nothing but a suitcase: that's all they have left.

Some are returning to their home towns. As their train pulls in to the town they squeeze to the windows, to the door. They search for their streets, their houses. But all they can see is a field of bricks. No streets. No houses. Nobody waiting.

– Jonas Mekas, *I Had Nowhere to Go*
On the 27th of April, 1945, curator Ernst Fischer opened Malmö Museum’s doors to the survivors of the German concentration camps, transforming the museum into a refugee shelter for those who were rescued by the white buses of the Red Cross.

Emaciated and traumatized people were given a roof over their heads, surrounded by the paintings and objects of the museum. To get to the newly designated dormitory on the second floor, they took the main staircase, passing under Eugene Jansson’s celebratory figure-in-landscape painting, *Badtavla*, and other early 20th-century works.

Sven X:et Erixson’s 1945 painting of nurses guiding refugees through Malmö Museum – an indelible image for this fragment of time – makes this history seem more whole to me.
“A curatorial situation is always one of hospitality,” I read in the book *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions*. “It implies invitations – to artists, artworks, curators, audiences, and institutions; it receives, welcomes, and temporarily brings people and objects together, some of which have left their habitual surroundings and find themselves in the process of relocation… [the] situation provides both the time and the space for encounter between entities unfamiliar with one another.”

The word curator, from the latin *curare*, to take care of, was in my vocabulary long before I was familiar with the art world profession. In my primary school there was a person working as a kurator, the one who cared for the students and teachers, and it feels right these days to balance thoughts of care and thoughts of art-making simultaneously in my mind.
My friend who’s a philosopher says that words make us apprehend new things, or even new forms of things, new layers of reality. They add a new dimension to sensibility. We read or hear about an interesting character, and we see that character reflected in people we meet or in other fictional characters.

Can we view language as a sense? Most of the time, I feel like words do the opposite for me. They bring me further away from my feelings. But I still like to think about the possibilities of language.

Now and again, I do happen to find a word which resonates with my body and my senses, a word that defines something important, something hard to pin down. A word that sounds and feels like what it is.

*Grudge.*

*Mother tongue.*

There’s no exact translation in Swedish for the word *grudge.* When I talk about feelings in Swedish, my first language, I often feel a sense of lack with the words. Grudge: a persistent feeling of ill will or resentment resulting from a past insult or injury to the soul.

A feeling turned into an object stuck inside your chest or carried on your shoulder, as if the body forgot how to let it go. This noun has bodily experience written into it. The weight of a heavy feeling to carry. A grudge.

Likewise, I love how the term *mother tongue* makes me think about the actual tongues of mothers, where your true language comes from, inherited straight from your mother’s tongue. A language of origin, a first language learned from your mother’s body. Not just the spoken language, but the one you know long before words.
– Jablonski? But that’s a proper Polish name.

(There are names of places that have always been present in my life but that I’ve never seen, that I wouldn’t be able to pronounce or even spell.)

– I’m from here.

(People here ask each other where they are from a lot.)

– Yes, but before. Where are your parents from?

– From here.

– Why did your grandparents choose to come here?

– They didn’t choose.
In 2015 I was asked to make a work for a group show at Västerås konstmuseum relating to the museum’s collection.

The first time I visited the collection in the back room where it’s stored and cared for by the conservator Christina Runeson, I was struck by how the sculptures, paintings, and dissembled installations were united in this pleasantly temperature-controlled room.

Christina had placed the works according to how they could best be stored in this room together, not according to their age, or material, or value, but another more intimate ordering of things. It changed the gaps and relations between the works; who made them, or when they were made, seemed less important.

Some of the sculptures had pillows, or blankets. Some looked you in the eye. This installation, based only on the care of the objects themselves, revealed a new aesthetics for me, new thoughts and new ways of relating to objects.

As my contribution to the show, I moved one row of shelves from the back room into the gallery space, and projected the sound of the storage room’s fan system into the gallery, to let the aesthetics of care shape my sculpture-making in its own right.
“Is it possible to describe something completely beyond intellect – the moment when your thoughts, words, sentences explode in your head?” asked my friend Evis in an email the other day.

Liminality, in the field of anthropology, describes the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of cultural rituals that establish change. It can also describe the phase of transition between two so-called ‘normal’ conditions. One stands at the threshold between previous ways of structuring identity, time, or community, and the unknown that’s yet to come. Social hierarchies can be reversed or dissolved, long-standing traditions can suddenly become uncertain, expected outcomes thrown into doubt.

“While you struggle to make sense of anything and everything,” Evis wrote, “you have to reinvent yourself and your understanding of the world. That forward movement can be incredibly painful, as powerful as a blast wave.”
Samuel Pepys (1633 – 1703), a British naval administrator, wrote in his diary the first known account of what is now a common slumber party ritual for teenage girls, *Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board*, a levitation game in which a prone body can be lifted, seemingly by magic, by engaging a collective focus:

“This evening with Mr. Brisband, he told me this of his own knowledge, at Bourdeaux, in France; He saw four little girles, very young ones, all kneeling, each of them, upon one knee; and one begun the first line, whispering in the eare of the next, and the second to the third, and the third to the fourth, and she to the first. Then the first begun the second line, and so round quite through, and, putting each one finger only to a boy that lay flat upon his back on the ground, as if he was dead; at the end of the words, they did with their four fingers raise this boy as high as they could reach, and he [Mr. Brisband] being there, and wondering at it, as also being afeard to see it, for they would have had him to have bore a part in saying the words, in the roome of one of the little girles that was so young that they could hardly make her learn to repeat the words, did, for feare there might be some sleight used in it by the boy, or that the boy might be light, call the cook of the house, a very lusty fellow, as Sir G. Carteret’s cook, who is very big, and they did raise him in just the same manner. This is one of the strangest things I ever heard, but he tells it me of his owne knowl-edge, and I do heartily believe it to be true. I enquired of him whether they were Protestant or Catholique girles; and he told me they were Protestant, which made it the more strange to me. Thus we end this month, as I said, after the greatest glut of content that ever I had; only under some difficulty because of the plague, which grows mightily upon us, the last week being about 1700 or 1800 of the plague.”
A friend from my teenage years died in 2014, and I attended his funeral in a Protestant Church. I didn’t know the rituals. At one apparently pre-determined moment, everyone got up from the benches and walked up to the coffin, a big rectangular box made out of wood with a body inside of it (I think), and said their goodbyes. I did too. I really did. I listened closely to the priest’s speech, longing to hear what he would say, because what can you say when a young person dies? Is twenty-eight years a full life? I wondered.

Andreas always wore a camouflaged Carhartt anorak (I wore a blue one), and then one day he was not among us any more — back then, when we were fifteen and a boy squad. He went blind, “lost his sight gradually,” they said. The fact made me ache inside, there was so much left for us to see, I thought. I remember Andreas and I being teenage-drunk in a field, looking at our friend’s freshly tattooed shoulder, a fish skeleton.
He returned – into my life, that is; obviously he existed in his own history the entire time. He showed up as a fellow student when I enrolled at the art academy in Stockholm. He looked at me from the side with one eye. He told me he didn’t stay in touch with anyone from the old gang and asked if I did.

Adam told me about December 23rd. Every year, the day before Swedish Christmas, they would meet up at Birkastans Pizza in Stockholm, these people who knew each other as who we were as teenagers, many now re-categorized by society. A tradition that took root when they were young adults, living at home with parents who gave them pocket money for a pizza with friends. They don’t have each other’s phone numbers anymore. Some of them wouldn’t call each other friends. Moa stopped showing up after the first years and Andreas didn’t go in 2012, and he won’t be there in the years to come. Adam says that it’s bad vibes every single year but I like to know they still meet there.

“Don’t fill your life with days. Fill your days with life,” said the priest. I’d never heard anyone say that before.
An elderly family member died around the same time. With her key in my hand, going up the elevator in her apartment building, I met a neighbour who asked me who I was visiting there. Ann-Marie, I said.

Inside the three-room apartment I opened a tall, thin cupboard, and in it, next to the vacuum cleaner, were a teddy bear and two men’s suits that used to belong to her son, my cousin Sven, who died of AIDS in the nineties along with so many other young men.

“The closer to death, the safer you are,” I heard a person joining ISIS say on the radio.
The Ise Shrine in Japan is a 2000 year old site of Shinto worship and one of my favourite places to think about. There are two identical shrines within the complex and every twenty years, according to the tradition of Shikinen sengū, one is built and the other is taken down. At the same time that an ancient building technique is preserved, the volatility and impermanence of all things is celebrated. A building can be born and die, born and die, and be constantly replicated over time.
In a folder on my desktop I have a document called ‘Ord vid Ellas begravning’ (Words for Ella’s funeral) that my father sent to me in September, 2009, and which I first read in the winter of 2011. In our world she became our mother, grandmother, great grandmother. She was proud of these honourable titles. She lived with us here but in parallel worlds, one of which had been annihilated.
In 2016 I visited Poland for the first time. The light was mild and yellow. I felt connected to the nature there, but I have no words to describe what it was like to visit the crime scenes of the war, the bullet-ridden buildings that were once my ancestors’ homes and holy places.

In Piotrkow Trybunalski, my grandmother’s hometown, I lifted a hexagonal stone from the pavement and carried it back with me to Stockholm, along with some sand from both my grandparent’s birthplaces.

I cast a sculpture in solid pink glass to fit the bottom of the stone. It spent two months in the oven, and when it came out I called it Rebecka. It comes from the verb קָרַץ in Hebrew, meaning “to tie firmly, to braid,” or “beautifully ensnaring.”
In the remains of my grandmother’s belongings, I found a small collection of similarly-shaped stainless steel cones in various sizes. For a long time I kept them in my studio, their form reminding me of something between a trophy, a kitchen utensil, and something more undefined and religious.

Vases, my father told me. She sold flowers in a shop when she first came here after the war.

She went to the cinema with my sisters and I in the nineties and watched Die Hard. She said she could smell the dead bodies on the screen. We couldn’t.

“Can you inherit a memory of trauma? Yes” reads a line in the Guardian. Studies show that the grandchildren of holocaust survivors have a stronger predisposition for post-traumatic stress disorder. It may be read like text in our broken DNA.

I discovered that these vases I inherited from my grandmother are standard in Stockholm hospitals and funeral homes. An industrial object made to display flowers. I rode my bike around the hospitals collecting more of them, and casted a few of the forms in solid, clear glass and had one made in marble, to see what would shift within the material, within their language.
On the train platform, heading for the airport.

Before I left the house I polished my black Air Force 1’s, and now when I look down at my feet I think, that is way too shiny. A second later I reach for my wallet in the inner pocket of my black coat, and while pulling it out, a dust cloud of compact powder sprinkles down onto my shoes. I rub them with the palm of my hand and my shoes are back to matte black.

Airplane nap.

Dreamt of thick slabs of stone, like giant slivers of glass, dotted along a coastline. As if they’ve been planted like garden plants, or dropped from above into the soft, cool, porous soil. I need to know what they are so I start digging with my hands along the edges. Easy! Because the soil isn’t packed. They seem to continue forever down into the ground. Then it hits me that they are actually growing, growing from the inner layers of the earth, and when I close my eyes I can see it happening. It disturbs me and impresses me deeply all at once.
Greece and Turkey. I went to both coastlines.

I felt the movement of bodies and I touched Hellenistic monuments and I saw the Greek souvenir shops selling tents and solar cell phone chargers next to postcards and artisanal honey. I saw sunbathers next to broken rubber dinghies. When I got back here I talked to my young friend who made it up here and he misses his mum.

Nothing gets built in this war. People are dying on open land and sea, crossing to unknown futures in the midst of ancient history, on lands where similar stories befell local residents just a hundred years earlier. Will we be visiting their destroyed monuments to remember them?
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