

Ulf Stubbe Teglbjærg

Soft Borders

Medievalism, Hard Boys and Environmental
History

Hovedoppgave i Bachelor i billedkunst

Veileder: Anne-Karin Furunes

Medveileder: Martinus Suijkerbuijk

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Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet

Kunstakademiet i Trondheim



Kunnskap for en bedre verden

abstract - english

This text aims to bring together the research behind my artistic practice. With a focus on the various interpretations of the middle age and how these interpretations influence each other, generally referred to as medievalism. Through pop-culture and medieval fantasy, views based on “vibes” for historical continuity can emerge, often clashing with the academic research.

The fantasy worlds inspired by the medieval period, fx Lord of the Rings, are worlds of extremes, fondness transcends to true love and badness escalates to the true evil. This, along with a lack of representation of gender, allows for a queer reading, when all the extreme feelings are from men about other men.

The issue of historical continuity comes again in folk horror, where the continuation of an old way of life means a continuation of a culture that should have been long dead. Folk horror also introduces anxieties around the anthropocene, with people merging with the land. In the anthropocene the whole question of human agency is being renegotiated, with the change from biological agents to agents of geology, humans as an environmental condition instead of individuals.

abstract - dansk

Med denne tekst forsøger jeg at samle alt den research jeg har samlet under min kunstneriske praksis. Med et fokus på de forskellige tolkninger af middelalderen og hvordan disse har indflydelse på hinanden, studiet af middelalder tolkninger kaldes for middelalderisme. Med popkultur og middelalder inspireret fantasy er der opstået en ide om historisk kontinuitet som er baseret på hvad som “føles” rigtigt/gammeldags, denne forståelse er ofte i modstrid med de akademiske historikeres opfattelse.

Middelalder-inspirerede fantasiverdener, som Ringenes Herre, er verdner af ekstremer, kun de store følelser på spil, kærlighed og ondskab. Manglen på kønsrepræsentation gør det muligt at lave en queer læsning af disse verdner, hvor mænd har ekstreme følelser om andre mænd.

Ideen om historisk kontinuitet kommer igen i genren folk horror, her betyder det bare at en kultur, ofte ude på landet, som burde være stoppet, lever videre. Forholdet mellem landet/naturen og mennesket portrætteret som noget uhyggeligt i folk horror, er noget som kommer igen i den antropocæne tidsalder. Med det antropocæne bliver der sat spørgsmålstegn til menneskeheden agens, når mennesket bliver en miljøtilstand i stedet for et individ.

+ Soft Borders + Medievalism, Hard Boys and Environmental History

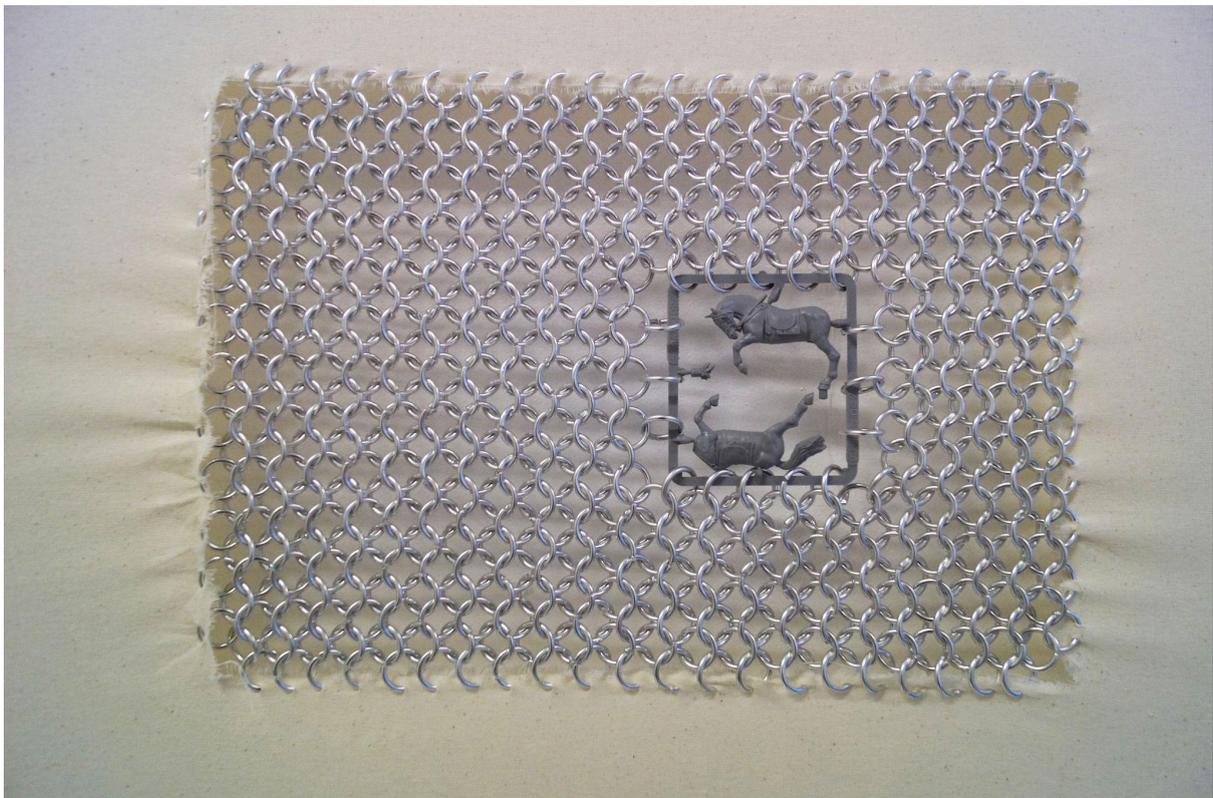
intro

Historical ages have shimmering edges that overlap with one another, like the water it is both transparent and reflective, allowing one to look through it for thousands of years while always also looking at oneself, like the river it meanders and erodes, leaving its mark in the earth. This looseness of definition breeds interpretation, and so categories enter the world stage, categories such as “Viking Age”, “Byzantine Empire” and “hunter- gatherer culture”. The categories create their own stereotypes that get solidified in pop-culture. Pop-culture, being culture, in return influences the interpretation of the categories, adding to the chaos, requiring new categories.

It is one of these meta categories or history of histories, that is very influential on my artistic practice – *medievalism*, the study and recreation of the medieval period. The middle age is many different things and within it it contains other ages such as the “late antique” period and the “viking age”, but how? why?

My aim is not so much to analyze medievalism, rather it is to add to it, expand it, use it to look at environmental history, to create a new category that spirals out of control, a sort of *hyper-medievalism*.

4Ever looping rings interlinked in chainmail



first stage of hyper-medievalism, 2023 (close-up)

Medievalism I: Ancient Vibes and the Nation

The medieval time period in a broader European context is generally referred to as the time from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the early 5th century to the mid to early 15th to 16th century, with the defining events being the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453), Columbus' voyage to America (1492) and, the reformation(1540). The division of ages varies between cultures, as can be seen with the three different (and unrated) ending points, the starting point of the period is also somewhat vague, many Mediterranean cultures use the term "late antiquity" ending it at different times, like 711 in Spain with the arrival of the Moors¹. In Scandinavia the "viking age" was added during the romantic period (ca, 1800-70, in Danish context) invented as a time before the middle age and after the iron age. A new age to show the historical glory of the Scandinavian peoples². This new age was set from the 700s to the early thousands. Even within Scandinavia the dates vary, the end of the Norwegian viking age is in 1066 with the battle of Stamford Bridge while the end of the Danish viking age is said to be the crowning of Svend Estridsen in 1047. The viking age somehow exists within the European middle ages.

Medievalism is generally thought of as the reconstruction of the middle ages in various cultural forms. It is here that the styles and aesthetics emerge, both the fairytale and the grimdark³ ones. Due to the medieval period being so long and having so much going on within it, one could even say that medievalism started while the middle ages was still the contemporary ages, with the likes of Snorri Sturlausen writing about the Norse mythology of his ancestors, reinterpreting it to fit a Christian audience and Saxo writing his *Chronicle of the Danes*. Both of them writing in the thirteenth century, about the past, but still a past within what we would call the middle age. The history that Saxo writes starts out very mythological and gradually shifts to be less myth oriented, but still very much a propaganda text, always casting the Danish as the heroes and Swedish as the villains, all the way back through ancient history. Both Saxo and Snorri make an effort to create a cohesive link between the pre-Christian Scandinavian peoples and the "good" heathens of ancient Greece and Rome. Snorri saying that the Norse gods were actually just powerful men from Troy – the "æsir" from Asia(minor)⁴ something very akin to the Romans also claiming heritage from Troy. Saxo claims that the Norse gods were just witches and magicians in exile from Constantinople and they now live in Uppsala in Sweden⁵. With these claims they are tying in the Scandinavian histories with the western European cannon (*greco-roman fanfiction*) while legitimizing their heathen mythological past by reducing the gods to humans.

It would seem that the Romans set the standard from which all later European nations (realms/empires) have tried to measure themselves and to claim a glorious past by, either as a successor state or as one of the "strong" tribes that could topple the empire. The Scandinavians have historically placed themselves as the people who were fighting Rome, the

¹ "Museo Arqueológico Nacional: Guidebook" Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2023

² Adam Holm, interview with Anders Lundt Hansen and Sophie Bønding, "Kampen om historien: Farvel til vikingetiden?" April 2023

https://open.spotify.com/episode/6XF0gqcqEDjPVhbtGoQxOc6?si=rMosy0JPQI2U_NBqOOOr2zw

³ Sigurdson, Ericka, "Uncovering the Dark Truth: Why Medieval Films Are So Grim" June 2, 2023, Youtube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gciU0u9oVNU>

⁴ Kure, Henning, "*I begyndelsen var skriget; Vikingetidens myter om skabelsen*", Gyldendal, 2010

⁵ Stangerup, Helle, "Saxo: Danmarkskrøniken 1", Aschehoug, 1999

Danish claiming heritage from the Cimbres and the Swedish claiming from the Goths⁶. These efforts of propaganda must have worked, since in much pop-culture media the ones who are presented as opposition to the Romans, are a sort of viking stand-in, rather than the various nomadic tribes of the migration period, such as the Huns. An example of the Romans vs the Vikings is in the videogame *the elder scrolls v: Skyrim*, wherein the imperial Roman stand-ins are portrayed as the invaders of the wild and harsh viking land, Sryrim, protected by the Stormcloaks, a viking inspired faction. Both the Romans and the vikings have been used as vessels for nationalistic nation building in the romantic period up until the rise of facism and nazism. The Nazis claimed both the Roman and Nordic, for example using the s runes for their ss tropes while appropriating a Roman color scheme of white, black and red along with loads of other iconography such as the roman standard showing an eagle. In the Danish radio program *Kampen om historien* (the fight about history) in the episode *Farvel til vikingetiden?* (Goodbye to the viking age?) the historian Anders Lundt Hansen, claims that the Nazis, only took the romantic idea of nordic exceptionalism to its logical conclusion⁷ and argues for the dismantling of the concept of the viking age.

When describing what “feels” like medieval Europe, most of the time what is meant is medieval France, England and west Germany, where Scandinavia is seen as being in the Viking age and the meditation countries being split between a continuation of Romans in Byzantium and being a part of the muslim world like with Spain and Sicily, meanwhile eastern europe is doing who knows what. This view tends to be very oriented on the west, this can be seen in the English translation of the title for the rulers of the Kievan Rus, being “prince” i.e. something under the rank of king⁸ or it can be seen when the celtic and germanic tribes (including vikings) are cast as the arch rival instead of the Persian empire⁹. More so these apparent isolated islands of culture are creating their own archetypes, and it might be the archetypes that are pitted against each other, rather than the cultures themselves – “*who would win in fight, a disciplined Roman legionary or a Viking berserker?*” The use of the roman-viking axis in regard to nationality, race and masculinity is explored further in the text *Fantasies of the North: Medievalism and Identity in Skyrim* by philosopher Victoria Elizabeth Cooper, when writing about the the in-world civil war of Skyrim and how it reflects on the real world they write:

“This conflict is symbolic of, even if in a simplified manner, the contemporary political struggles of whiteness in the West (...) In providing access to experience the world from these two poles of white, historical identity, Skyrim offers the chance to explore the anxiety over whiteness and the place of heritage, freedom and safety in a multicultural and increasingly threatening political environment¹⁰.”

⁶Christiansen, Erik. 2011. “OM GOTER, KIMBRER OG ANDET GODTFOLK”. Temp - Tidsskrift for Historie 2 (3):22-36. <https://tidsskrift.dk/temp/article/view/24811>.

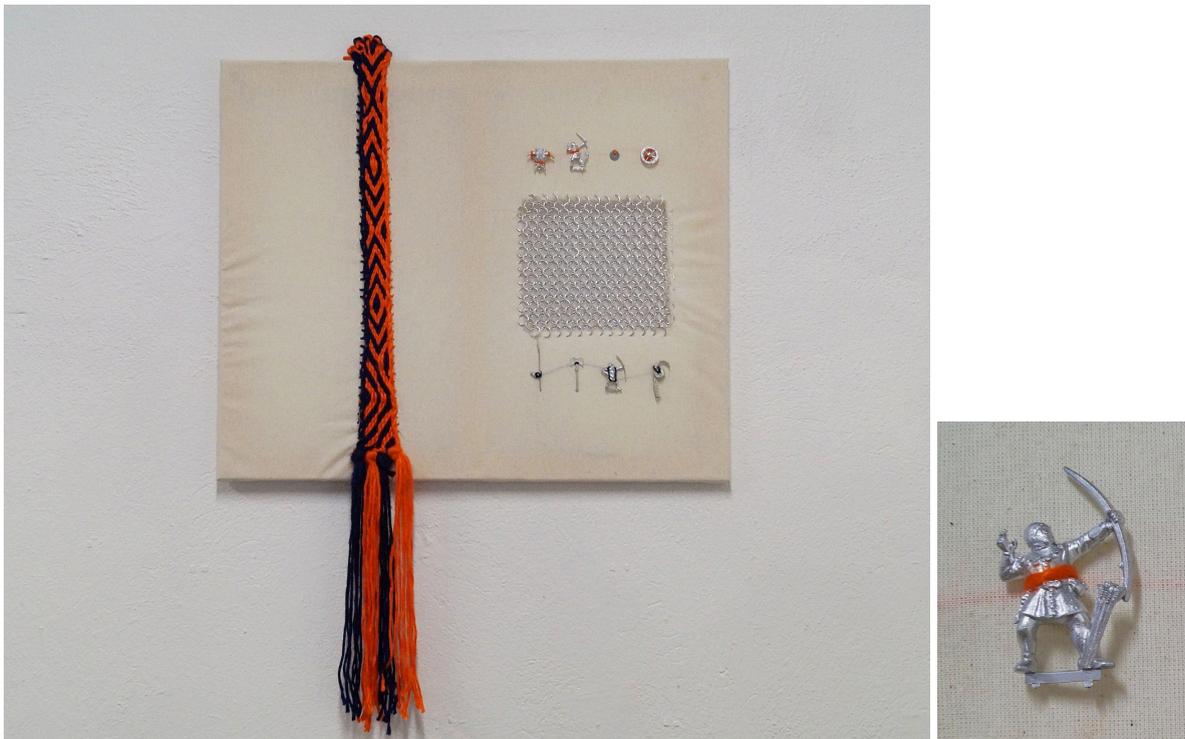
⁷ Holm, Kampen om historien: Farvel til vikingetiden?

⁸ Anthony Kaldellis interview with Christian Raffensperger, “Byzantium and Friends: The kingdom of Rus’ and medieval Europe, with Christian Raffensperger” October 2019, <https://byzantiumandfriends.podbean.com/e/7-the-kingdom-of-rus-and-medieval-europe-with-christian-raffensperger/>

⁹ Ryan, Garrett “Rome and Persia: 700 years of rivalry (with Adrian Goldsworthy)” June 16, 2023, YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ea20iQV-fHk&t=3126s>

¹⁰ Cooper, Elizabeth “Fantasies of the North: Medievalism and Identity in Skyrim” The University of Leeds, June 2016 <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/16875/>

When I was younger I often felt that the medieval age, along with Norse mythology, and by extension the fantasy genre, was seen as a form of escapism, not really having any influence on “our” world and time. And so in high school I joined a Facebook group on Indo-European, Slavic and Germanic history and culture. In this group I quickly learned about some “alternative” ways of viewing history and what to use it for, in this case racist arguments against Muslims during the refugee crisis at the time (2015). It seemed as if a toxic fan culture had arisen, one in which the fans claim ownership over something because they are the fans, and therefore know best, not willing to interrogate the subject of the fandom, in this case history, critically. Meanwhile academic historians seem to be very much fans of the critical analysis, a methodology that can have a tendency to leave out things that are not texts¹¹, and so the aesthetic reproduction is left in a weird place, between archeology, art, pop-culture, reenactment and children's books, ready to be used and misused for creating, amongst other things, arbitrary archetypes. So two fandoms of history, one more concerned with the cool factor, often of great men and great peoples during great things, shaping the world in their image, and the other is more concerned with the underlying systems of how human civilizations, cultures and individuals have progressed, regressed and interacted with each other, over time. These two views will produce widely different outcomes when tasked with constructing a historical continuity.



second stage of hyper-medievalism, 2024 (+close-up)

a quick note on the word “viking”

There are a lot of ideas of what the word “viking” means, the general consensus is that it means raider, or somebody who goes ashore to plunder (“vik” meaning bay)¹². The debate is then if we should have an age named after, what in today's world, would be categorized as terrorists. It gets further complicated when the cultural act of piracy gets tied to an unified

¹¹ interview with expert, Wickstrøm, Daniel Dyrendal Rosenlund

¹²Williams, Gareth, “Inledning”, *Viking*, G. Williams, P. Pentz & M. Wemhoff, Nationalmuseet, 2013

ethnicity, which “the vikings” were not¹³. In this text I use the word “viking” as a catch all term for the peoples and cultures of early medieval Scandinavia (excluding the Sami and Finns), but the word is itself an example of medievalism, since it’s based more on what “feels” right and not what the ancient peoples would have called themselves.

Medievalism II: Medieval Fantasy, New Mythologies and Queerness

Along with the nation building of medievalism is the aesthetic usage and reproduction. Due to J.J.R. Tolkien's heavy inspiration from Norse mythology and his works' subsequent popularity, later interpretation of the mythology has been viewed in the fantasy style. The most obvious example of this are the dwarves there are no mythological description saying that the dwarves were of small stature¹⁴, Tolkien might not have been the first one to use this trope, Disney's Snow White probably also has a part to play, but Tolkien's dwarves having a lot more agency than the ones of Snow White, being a lot more than background characters, might have solidified the trope, which follows most of the modern representations of the Norse mythology.

In the videogame Age of mythology¹⁵ the Norse culture is grouped together with the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, and shown as contemporaries. The aim of the game developers was not to create a historically accurate game¹⁶, rather it seems to be put together based on what feels old – “ancient vibes”. Something like this is also done in the Marvel comics, and in their subsequent cinematic universe with Norse god Thor¹⁷ becoming a part of the super hero team, later on the ancient Egyptian mythos is joined with the project in the streaming series Moon Knight¹⁸. These two mythologies together have a time span of at least four thousand years.

Decentralized culture generally lends itself towards being more open for interpretations, hence why both the Norse mythology and middle ages are ripe for fantastical interpretations. In medieval Europe it was more common to have more kinship with the people of one's region rather than one's nation, the citizens of the Holy Roman Empire didn't identify as Holy Romans instead they were Saxons, Bavarians, Bohemians, Milanese, etc, with the local lords swearing personal allegiance to the king or emperor¹⁹. The point of the personal allegiance is especially important, when the ruler died, he could, legally by Germanic law, divide the realm in more parts if he had more children (sons) he wanted to inherit his legacy, such is the example of Charlemagne the Great dividing the realm in, West Francia, Middle

¹³ Downham, Clare, 2018 “Forsker: Vikingerne var ikke ‘racerene’ skandinaver!” videnskab.dk, accessed March 29, 2024

<https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/forsker-vikingerne-var-ikke-racerene-skandinaver/>

¹⁴ Kure, “I begyndelsen var skriget; Vikingetidens myter om skabelsen”

¹⁵ Age of Mythology, 2003, ensemble studios

¹⁶ “Bruce Shelley discusses Age of Mythology historic accuracy” remember-ensemblestudios, accessed March 29, 2024

<https://remember-ensemblestudios.com/ensemble-studios/ensemble-blogs-archive/bruce-shelley-discusses-age-of-mythology-historic-accuracy/>

¹⁷ Branagh, Kenneth, director. “Thor” Marvel studios, 2011

¹⁸ Slater, Jeremy, creator. “Moon Knight” Disney+, 2022

¹⁹ Hoffmann-Becking, Dirk, “History of the Germans: Ep. 22 – Konrad II, Who Would Have Thought – Electing a most unlikely successor to Henry II” July, 2021 (podcast)

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/10DA0k7FSKbTTmUud3vh3V?si=da19035cedb24648&nd=1&dlsi=4fb28e879cc4366>

Francia and East Francia²⁰, the ruler existed as a person, not an institution. In fiction this focus on the personal intertwined with the state creates the highest stakes possible. In the YouTube livestream by the channel Alt Shift X, discussing the sixth episode of the fantasy series *House of the Dragon*²¹ (a game of thrones prequel series focused on a succession crisis) the host remarks that:

*...the theme of you know, intimate sexuality and intimate relationships being conflated and connected to grand political issues and wars (...) isn't it crazy that who dicks who is of national security importance?*²²

On top of this the royal ruling family, of House of the Dragon, that is splintering, are the rulers because they have access to and control of dragons, but in order to keep the power, only members of the family are allowed to ride them, this leads to a status quo where the weapons of mass destruction are in the hands of a few inbred teenagers, an exaggerated parody of our own world.

Fantasy creates a world that is the "most it can be", in *House of the Dragon* it is the merging of the human with the state that creates larger than life drama, in *Lord of the Rings* it is the ultimate battle between good and evil. This world of extremes can create situations that are interesting to explore, for example when fondness taken to the extreme becomes true love, paired with the lack of women, in *Lord of the Rings*, this creates an opportunity for a queer reading. As the youtube channel Maggie Mae Fish points out in their video essay *Queering Lord of the Rings and The Old Guard*

*"High fantasy often goes with the most dramatic choice. Bad guys aren't just bad, they're evil. It's not just the Shire that's in trouble, but all of Middle Earth. People are not infatuated, they are in love. And following those fantasy tropes, there's space to look at Sam and Frodo's relationship as that of a romantic couple. Story-wise, it helps flesh out why Sam is ready to risk it all and carry his loved one up the mountain when he is unable to carry himself."*²³

I applied this queer logic to European medieval history, where the inclusion of men in the source material, far outnumber the women, for my exhibition "Søker?" at Galleri Blunk October 2022. As another example of medievalism.

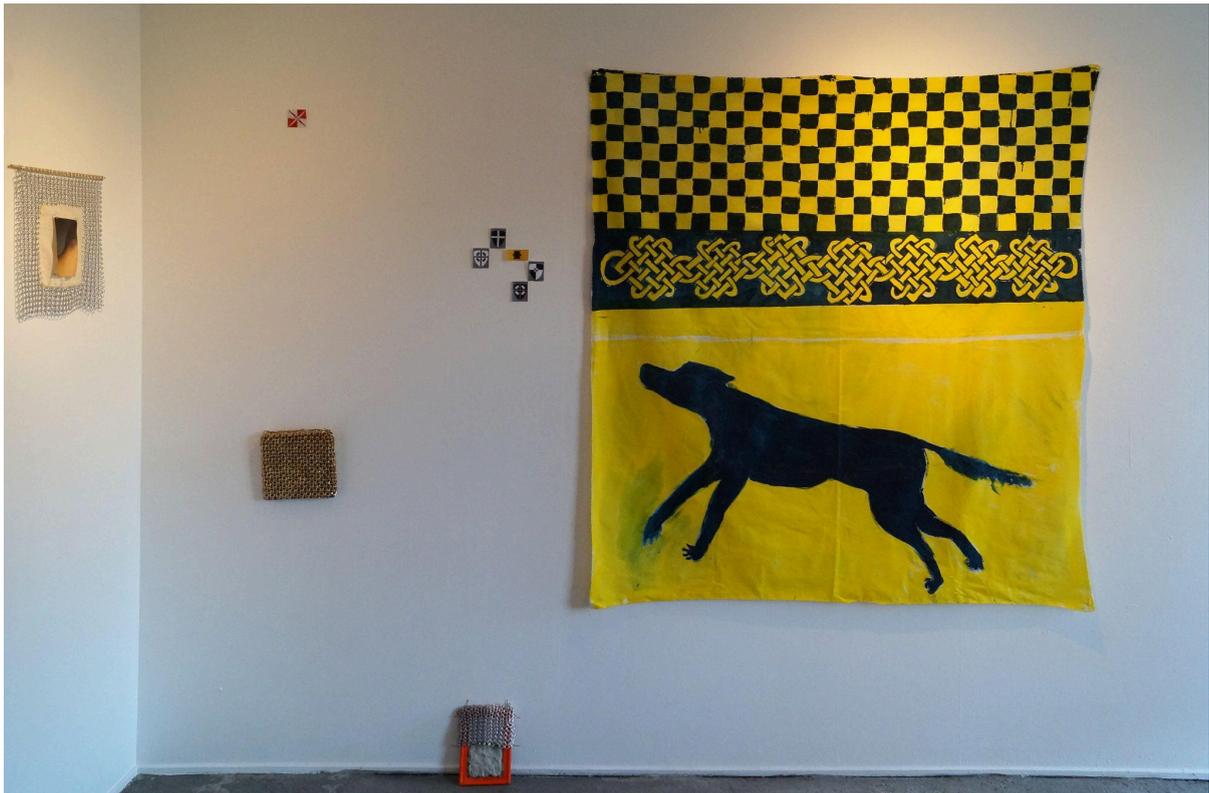
²⁰ Hoffmann-Becking, Dirk, "History of the Germans: Prolog - Part 1", "Prolog - Part 2" & Prolog - Part 3" January 2021 (podcast)

<https://open.spotify.com/show/7cvGmixy8K3LD4AkWNbjMH?si=abf8aed076de4457>

²¹Condal, Ryan & Martin, George Raymond Richard, creators. "House of the Dragon" HBO, 2022-

²² Alt-Shift X "House of the Dragon S1E06 live Q&A discussion" September 26. 2022, YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3dlZ8io6Q0> (time of quote: 38:30)

²³ Fish, Maggie Mae "Queering Lord of the Rings and The Old Guard" January 21. 2021, YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBck3tNj-1g&t=415s>



installation view of the exhibition "Søker?" at Galleri Blunk 2022

Søker? (the exhibition text)

"Søker?" is an exhibition about aimlessly searching, and about linking together grindr and the cultural identities surrounding the middle ages. Grindr is a "dating-app" primarily targeting bi and gay men, it has a reputation of being a hook-up app, so for the users of the app the most common question is "what are you searching for?" or just "søker?". The middle ages are generally referred to as the time from around the year 400 to around 1500 in Europe, it is a very long historical period that in itself contains smaller, more cultural specific, time periods, such as the viking age. So when referring to the middle ages, one is referring to a lot of different things, it could be the Vikings, Andalusian Spain, the Crusades or the Mongol invasion of eastern Europe, due to this diversity you can find whatever worldview you are searching for in the medieval period, or at least in an interpretation of it.

The apps for dating highlight the merging of the human and the technology (or tool), even more so when the app in question, Grindr, is highly sexualized. The sexual liberty and agency that homosexual relations require gets entangled with the digital interface. I think of Heidegger's idea of the tool as an extension of the body, but here one is quite literally extending from the body, into the tool and then into another body. The dating apps, social media and other user based internet platforms, provide an interface that allows us to access each others' knowledge, bodies, ideas, and feelings. Medievalism within this hyper connected anthropocene world becomes a feedback loop, what feels like the vibes of the middle ages are being reinterpreted over and over again till the use of medievalism is rendered as deserialized as the medieval period itself. Maybe the biggest act of medievalism is the name the "middle age" the age between ages by its versatility a sort of non-age, the

temporal equivalent of liminal, this is why I think the middle age and its interpretations are so interesting, because all time is the time between the future and the past.



HARD BOYS, SOFT DRINKS, 2023

Ginnungagap - from the depth of time to the anthropocene

Ginnungagap is, in Norse mythology, the name given to the void that existed before the world. It is unsure what it means, but one interpretation is that it means the void of voids²⁴. In general there are a lot of unknowns in regard to the entire mythology, due to most of it being written down in the 13-hundreds, by christian scholars. The most known and popular version of the creation myth was written by Snorri Sturlausen, in Iceland.

Due to the biases of Snorri, the primary interpretation that I have been mostly inspired by in my practise is the one layd out in the book *i begyndelsen var skriget: vikingetidens myter om skabelsen* (in the beginning was the scream: the viking age's creation myths) by author and scolar Henning Kure. The general interpretation of the creation myth, that Snorri lays out, is that the world is created by Odin and his brothers out of the body of the first giant, Ymir. His blood is the water, his hair is the trees, his teeth are the rocks and so on, microcosmos turning into the macro cosmos, the anthropomorphic creature extending into and becoming the universe, notably his eyelashes are used to build fortifications around the home of the humans.

²⁴ Kure, "I begyndelsen var skriget; Vikingetidens myter om skabelsen"



“Blood of Ymir 1 and 2” exhibited fall 2021 at galleri KiT as part of the exhibition “Extractable Madness”

Kure argues that the wall of eyelashes is not a defense structure, rather it is representing more of a threshold between the known and unknown, the visible and invisible, between the concrete and the pure abstract. He argues that Ymir is not so much a person rather it is derivative of “ymr” the old Norse word for screaming hence the creation of the world is more a refinement of the abstract into the concrete, like screaming turning to words, he parallels this with the troll folklore, where the trolls will turn to stone in the sunlight, like the abstract horror under the bed disappearing when the light is turned on.

In this way the world is put on a spectrum, something that becomes more evident when looking at the word “world” itself coming from the old Norse words “verr” meaning man, and “öld” meaning age²⁵ so man-age or humantime. Kure also notes that the world creation is an ongoing project, it is not a perfect world that the gods create from the start that mankind later corrupts, like in Christianity, one example is that stars keep on being added to the sky. It is a quite common view that the giants are seen as forces of nature, and the gods as forces of culture, they are constantly negotiating their relationship.

The threshold idea where the eyelashes create a soft border between the abstract and concrete is something I had very much in mind when making the chainmail tent piece for the bachelor exhibition, here the chainmail is the hard, soft and semi-transparent membrane, meanwhile a tent is a negotiation between the human and unhuman(or natural, whatever that means)-world.

Of the land and mud

When medievalism is concerned with what feels old, and when mythology and folklore are so deeply intertwined, it makes sense to make a parallel with folk art, or at least the art and media that is concerned with ideas of the “folk”. Medievalism sees a large attempt to create a cohesive story of middle age to produce a historical continuity. Without going too in depth the use of folk-art as a term, in Scandinavian context, began in the romantic period, along

²⁵ Kure, “I begyndelsen var skriget; Vikingetidens myter om skabelsen”

with the collection of Norwegian folklore by Asbjørnsen and Moe²⁶, and the creation of the so-called viking age. These three aspects all concerned themselves with the idea of the folk and creating historical continuity between the land and the people living on it, but in different ways (I want to stress that folk-art, as a concept, is far less problematic than the ideology of the “viking age”, folk-art is inherently democratic since the focus is on what the people are creating outside of institutions²⁷, where the nordic exceptionalism of the viking age is inherently excluding)

The idea of the people extending into and becoming one with the ancestral land, is something more akin to Snorri’s idea of Ymir becoming the world, human micro-cosmos becoming the macro-cosmos. On the flipside of the nostalgia of the “folk” from the romantic period, exist the “folk horror”, here the continuation of the past means a continuation of a culture that should have been long dead, think of the cultic human sacrifice at the end of the *Wickerman*²⁸, the culture itself has become a zombie and nature becomes a force of isolation. In H.P Lovecraft’s story “Shadow over Innsmouth²⁹” the city of Innsmouth is surrounded by salt marshes and the inhabitants prey to and interbreed with the fishy “Deep ones”, becoming human fish hybrids, symbolized by the marsh landscape, half in water, half on land. Wetlands are not a landscape widely accessible to humans, the uncertainty of mud can be seen as somewhat uncanny. Lovecraft’s “deep ones” are just one of his many ancient monsters most famous is Cthulhu, who are also posed as an ancient god older than mankind, like the Greek Titans, or the Norse Ymir (Snorri’s interpretation), all ancient beings predating the second generation of gods. The separating and isolating aspects of nature in folk horror, highlight nature, especially the forest, as a transitional space, at least from the human perspective, the space between human settlements.

In *the Southern Reach* trilogy of books by Jeff Vandermeer the environment of a coastline is transformed by something alien, slowly creating new hybrid species and altering the minds of all who enter the “contaminated” zone called Area X. The main character of the first book of the series, *Annihilation*³⁰, is a biologist who specializes in transitional ecosystems, she spends a lot of time reminiscing about an old and abandoned parking lot in her hometown and comparing it to Area X, the alien zone of the coastline. The overgrown parking lot had become its own ecosystem, rendered invisible to the human eye by its unusefulness, almost as an illustration of the anthropocene, where humans have become an environmental condition rather than an animal. In the last book in the trilogy, *Acceptance*³¹, one storyline follows the people who inhabited the coastal area before the alien entity forced them to quite literally merge with the landscape in an act of environmental body horror.

In *Dark Ecology: for a logic for coexisting future*³² Timothy Morton describes the existential dread of turning on one’s car, on the one hand you are contributing to global warming, but on the other hand the individual person is so small in the grand scheme of things that it shouldn’t matter, so what is it? somehow humans are the biggest thread and as small a

²⁶“Asbjørnsen og Moe” Store Norske Leksikon, accessed March 29, 2024, https://snl.no/Asbj%C3%B8rnsen_og_Moe

²⁷ “folkekunst” Store Norske Leksikon, accessed March 29, 2024, <https://snl.no/folkekunst>

²⁸ Hardy, Robin, director “the Wicker Man” British Lion Films, 1973

²⁹ Lovecraft, Howard Phillips, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” Visionary Publishing Company, 1936

³⁰ VanderMeer, Jeff. “Annihilation” Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014

³¹ VanderMeer, Jeff. “Acceptance” Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014

³² Morton, Timothy. “Dark Ecology: for a logic for coexisting future” Columbia University Press, 2016

thread as everything else, a confusion and alienation about our own size. Dipesh Chakrabarty talks of the emergence of “climate history” and how the anthropocene sees mankind becoming an agent of not just biology, but also geology.

“To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals. They have always been so. There was no point in human history when humans were not biological agents. But we can become geological agents only historically and collectively, that is, when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself. To call ourselves geological agents is to attribute to us a force on the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species³³.”

Turns out the ancient apocalyptic titan was humanity after all. Here Kure’s idea of Ymir more as a force or substance between the abstract and concrete, comes back, when scaling mankind from biology to geology.



still from the video work: three dreams of ever repeating patterns, 2023

Interlinked - Mechanical Bodies and Glittering Houses

My primary material for the last two years has been chainmail. I’ve been using it to try and bridge the gap between the medieval and anthropocene. On the one hand it is a historical material for armor, but though it’s repeating pattern it has an element of mass production, at least for the amount of rings used for one piece. The technique is called “european four in one” where four rings go into one, making a square of rings that can be seamlessly stitched to the next set. The process puts me in a sort of mechanical mindset. The mechanical body is something I have also been inspired by from the Blade Runner movies, especially the second one *Blade Runner 2049*. In this sci-fi society a class of bioengineered androids has

³³ Chakrabarty, Dipesh 2009 “The Climate of History: Four Theses” The University of Chicago Press <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/undergraduate/modules/literaturetheoryandtime/chakrabarty.pdf>

been produced as a disposable labor force called Replicants, but as in most sci-fi stories they can not be fully controlled, the story follows the person, who is tasked with dealing with replicants who are not following their protocol. The main character called K is himself a replicant, after each assignment the police are testing him to see if he is still following orders without question, they monitor him closely as he recites a poem, while the camera zooms in on the back of his head.

"And blood-black nothingness began to spin... A system of cells interlinked within cells interlinked within cells interlinked within one stem... And dreadfully distinct against the dark, a tall white fountain played."³⁴

Calling back to something primordial of cells connected and water in darkness. Blade Runner 2049 is exploring what it means to be human, in this context the chainmail armor is a sort of exoskeleton, its flexibility allows it to follow the body and be an extension of it.



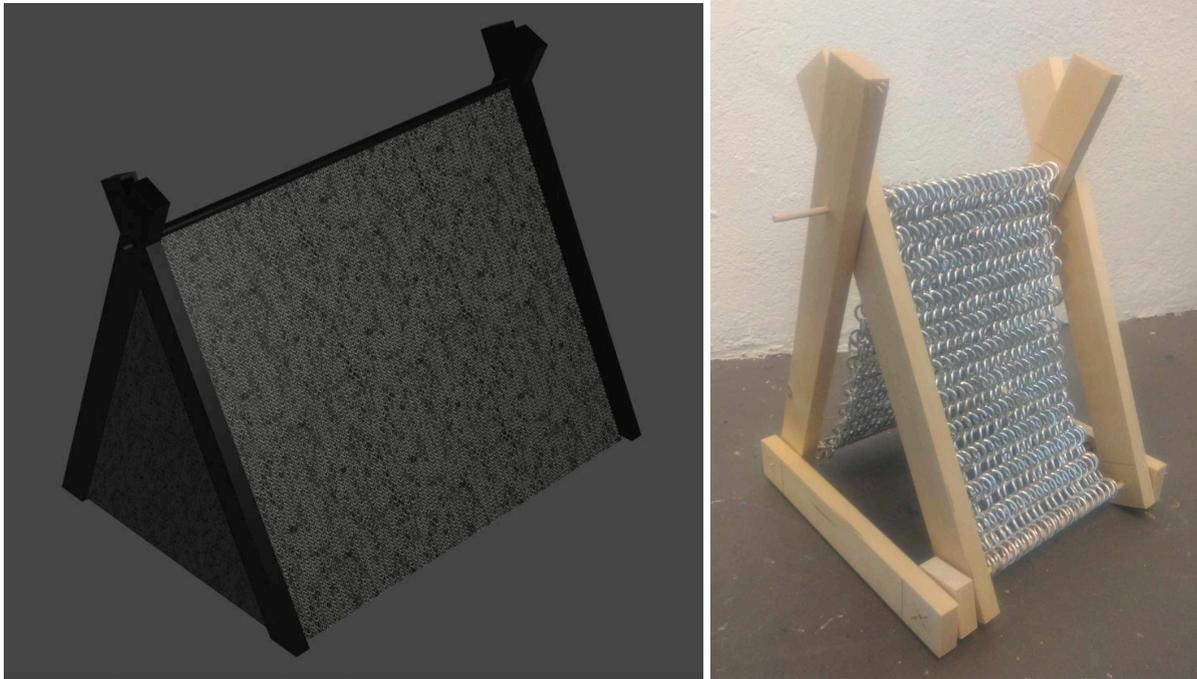
still from "Blade Runner 2047" dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2017 + untitled (hard boys, soft drinks 2) 2022

The existentialism of Blade Runner 2049 gets more and more intimate, something that my chainmail has also become to me since the process is so long and I have had my hands all over all the individual rings. During covid there was a lot of talk about breaking the chain of infection, an expression I heard again when talking about sexually transmitted diseases, a chainbased expression as a model of how bodies interact.



³⁴ Villeneuve, Denis, director "Blade Runner 2049", Alcon Entertainment, et al. 2017

The final project for my bachelor is a chainmail tent, where I try to bring all of my thoughts and research together.



models of the ongoing project

I am inspired by Kure's idea of the fence around the human world being a threshold between the abstract and concrete, chainmail, being semi transparent and where it becomes hard to define when interlocked rings become part of a whole, is somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, a sort of metallic mud. Another aspect in Norse mythology is houses made of weapons, armor and metal, like the great hall built of shields and spears in the *Vølsunge Saga*, or the house *Glitnir*, that has a shiny/glittering silver roof. The same dwarves that made Thor's hammer, also made a magic ring called *Draupnir* which every ninth night reproduces itself eight times, almost like the twisting patterns of DNA reproducing itself via a mix of mechanics and (seemingly) magic. In *Twilight of the Idols*³⁵ Nietzsche talks about how architecture is the greatest display of "will" in the arts, since it is the largest intervention in the landscape, I want to play with this idea by making a tent which is not an intervention in the landscape, but sits on top of it in the least invasive way.

There is something silly about using the wrong material that I like, like a glass hammer, yet one year of chainmail production is very insistent. By being easy to read as a tent, but clearly not working as such (chainmail is not waterproof) it can be a thing that in a way defies itself, and becomes its own self referential interpretation, much like medievalism. My hope is that the project can be an intermediate between all that I have discussed in this text, dissolving history, interpretation, masculinity and the anthropocene, allowing it to be remixed, blurring the borders between the categories – *soft borders*.

³⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich "Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer" 1889

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