



## **A Sense of Awe and Wonder**

---

**Author:** *Mona Wallström*

---



## ABSTRACT

---

The idea that objects can hold value or power within themselves is built on several societal agreements. First, the act of adding meaning to the object. Second, the society's trust in the meaning of the object. Third, the feature of the object as an intermediary – of stories, emotions, and experiences. This kind of objects will here be referred to as “charged”.

In this paper, I suggest that objects can transfer not-known-but-sensed experiences, that the object itself can communicate regardless of the sender.

An artefact in a museum collection is moved there from its origin context, through several events; the making, the collecting and the selecting for display. By focusing on these events, some of the charging aspects, as well as the questions of the value of unique objects, today's consumption patterns, and concerns on contributing to production have in this analysis been articulated. These objects and aspects have been examined from the perspective of contemporary jewellery making. This research includes 6 wearable objects created to make a visual interpretation of commonly known concepts of what this charged personal value could be.

Even though the current Swedish society is secular, charged objects can still be relevant – as a bearer of non-monetary values and personal meaning connected to existential experiences. The possibility of non-verbal mediating information and perspectives through an object is not easily trusted as it is not precise, but is an advantageous if reaching out for broader interpretations.

## INTRODUCTION

---

The artefacts in the collection from Congo area (now Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa) in the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm were acquired in the early 1900s. To a large extent, they were collected by Swedish missionaries. The majority of the objects are weapons and so-called nkisi. Nkisi are small objects, often sculptures or wearables that were considered to be connected to spirits or ancestors and were used for guidance: to bring fortune, as an intermediary of rituals, or as protection from diseases or enemies. Michael Barrett, curator and researcher at the museum likes to qualify them as “charged” as the nkisi ritual, visual and material practice is extremely complex and not easy to capture:

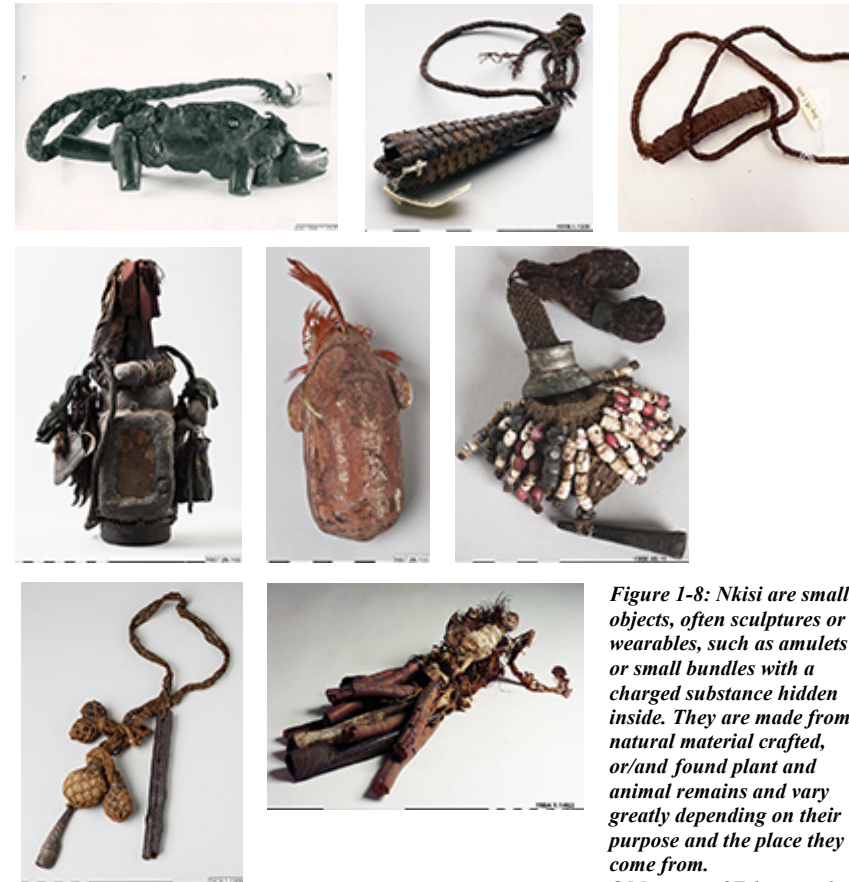
*“But even more important, nkisi is not one thing, but all of these: the spiritual being(s), the material composite of vessel plus ingredients, the rituals that must be performed to “catch the spirit”, the ritual specialists, i.e. nganga and assistants, the client that pays for the making of the nkisi and the surrounding society as the audience to support and be convinced by the spectacle of the rituals.”*

This research aims to examine these charged objects, nkisi, from different points of view – the nkisi maker's, the collector's, the museum's and the contemporary jeweller's. The making and the purpose of the object is examined, as well as how they were selected into the collection and how they are presented in their new context. This raises questions about if charged objects, objects with an immanent story or an existential or spiritual purpose, have a relevance in a European

secular society today and how this could be connected to the art jewellery field. The research connects to the artist's own practice by giving suggestions regarding how objects could be charged in our secular society and what wearable objects/jewellery could look like today.

### METHOD

This research uses written letters as the method of finding perspectives on mentioned charged artefacts and the connection to the art jewellery field. The letters are addressed to imagined representatives of the actors involved: a nkisi maker, a missionary, a museum and an anonymous fellow art jeweller. This fictional approach enables embedding the layers of events these objects carry and making up a story from both gathered pieces of information and the artist's own experiences. The questions of this research circle the personal and the existential and needs a more intimate form in order to come closer to the meaning of the object. The letters are not written to be answered, (some cannot be – for obvious reasons) but is a way of opening a space for thoughts and bringing in knowledge and experience that focuses on one particular perspective at a time. The narrative as a scene for transferred wisdom have been used in most cultures.



*Figure 1-8: Nkisi are small objects, often sculptures or wearables, such as amulets or small bundles with a charged substance hidden inside. They are made from natural material crafted, or/and found plant and animal remains and vary greatly depending on their purpose and the place they come from.*

©Museum of Ethnography  
Stockholm Sweden

November 2019

Dear Nkisi maker,

*I came upon the nkisi that you made in the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, Sweden. It brought up so many thoughts within me and it has occupied me for a long time now.*

*Because I am a maker myself, I understand the way you practically work with the nkisi. The preparing and handling of materials, the hardness, the irregularities, the climate impact, all the experience needed to get it right, the thoroughness in making. But what I am most curious about is the other part: the “charging” of the nkisi. The curator of the museum preferred this term, instead of “magical”, “powered” or “spiritualized”, so I’ll stick to “charged”.*

*So, dear Nkisi maker, how did you get the task to charge the objects? Did you choose it for yourself or were you chosen? Is it an inherited profession? How did you deal with the trust the believers gave you?*

*When making pieces myself, I often have something to express, a story to tell. I believe that these meanings can be transmitted through an object. There has to be an understanding though, not necessarily a precise one, so that the recipient can transform the experience of the object to make it their own.*

*I like to think of this kind of objects as tools or intermediaries for these needs. That we connect through them to other humans or beings.*

*Today we own a lot of things. Most of them do not really mean anything, they fill up our spaces for a while and then we throw or give them away. Humans learnt how to make things that make life easier. Our creativity made the things better and enabled us to make them faster so that more things could be made. This has accelerated, and now our society is consuming things to an extent that our environment and climate is collapsing. Now we need to reconsider all of this and ask ourselves why.*

*In societies where people don’t have so many things, of course the things made have more importance and you give every object more attention and care. You use local material, find the right one, process it so it becomes usable for this particular object and then make it as beautiful as possible and use the material to all of its capacity. This is what makes nature become culture.*

*During my life time, many new kinds of materials have been invented to perfectly fit their purpose of making new things. The materials are often quite good in regards of effectiveness, but they have a price when they contribute to lacking working conditions, climate change, environmental disasters, etc. Our society have good intentions, but we are destroying the earth in the name of culture.*

*Comparing our societies, existing in different times and places, is not easily done and may not even be appropriate. My interest lays in the conditions of being a nkisi maker, and in the practice of charging objects. It is close to thoughts that I have concerning my own work as a jeweller and artist. Our professions have similarities but, I think, we would define them totally differently if we had a chance to exchange perspectives on this.*

*Many thoughts are emerging in me and I might write you again when I have sorted them out a bit more.*

*With all my respect for your work,*

*Mona Wallström*

December 2019

Dear Missionary,

*I came across your name in a research project that I am doing at the Museum of Ethnography. You are stated as a collector of many of the artefacts from the Congo.*

*Of the majority of the artefacts, there is very little information, most often only the local name and the material it is made out of. Maybe you got instructed to do it this way, but you have to understand that it is hard for me, living in another time and place, to understand the artefacts. I have been thinking a lot about these objects and why you have chosen to collect them. I recently read a book called “Between Memory and Museum – a dialogue with folk and tribal artists” (Wolf & Wolf, 2015 p.18) that describes a collaboration between local museums and community in India. The book is looking at the museum as a collective memory from many angles. This is said about the collectors:*

*“In this sense all collections are contingent. The objects brought in to a museum have necessarily been displaced from their original contexts of use, worship or decoration. So, an exhibit begins to mean something only when an explanation is woven around it. But the accounts that locate the objects in a museum can never be complete, there is always more that can be said. Each narrative-however authoritative it may be- tells us more about the collector as it does about the collection.”*

*Now, when I know where the artefacts that you collected ended up, I can imagine the complexity of events and choices that finally resulted in the nkisi being placed in the showcase where it caught my eye. The nkisi has a religious or spiritual purpose. Is this the reason why you took it, because you were interested in the spiritual thinking? Or, was it a way to take power, magic or cultural identity away from them? The collection also includes a lot of weapons, so from my perspective it is not far as stretch to suspect that this could have been a way of disarming people – both physically and spiritually.*

*Did you feel that the nkisi was charged? If you felt it, I can understand that it was important for you to take them away. But didn't you wonder what the charge was and how it worked, effecting you with another belief and culture? If you didn't feel it, why collect so many? The nkisi are very nicely made, you can see how much effort that was put in making them detailed and expressive with a big collectible value. This must have been the case for most of the few things made in rural the Congo in the beginning of 1900. Collecting nkisi seems to have other purposes.*

*The society in which I live is what we call secular. Many people do not express an awe for God or gods in churches, mosques or temples. This does not mean that people don't have faith, but that their faith is a more personal position, not shared. In an individualistic country as mine, one might claim that this is a resistance against the socially constructed behaviour and rituals that all religions encourage. As an atheist, I actually can't imagine that we humans will end up in different sorts of after lives, if there is one. It seems very inconsistent. There must just be a need to make up different images of another kind of existences that mirrors our dreams and fears. Some cultures, like mine, seem to have a thicker membrane between this life and others, that affects how much they interact with each other.*

*A philosopher of today, Martin Hägglund (2019), states that mortality makes us free. This means that we will take better care of the life we have, if we accept the thought that this life is it, and not assume that something better is coming thereafter, like paradise or nirvana. To not strive for a better after life by doing good in this existence, but to do good in this life because this is the only chance we have. According to Hägglund, this is linked to how communities can be organized both in politics and ethics in order to make a better life for everyone.*

*I am sorry, I got triggered and started to preach myself. The missionary system provokes me and I have a hard time to accept what happened in the Congo in the name of your Faith. In a book on Swedish missionaries in the Congo (Pia Lundqvist 2018 p.46-47) it is claimed that the socio-cultural*

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder

*patterns in society were more affected than people's religious practice. The nkisi cult even increased during the colonization, even though elements of other religions were integrated. For me, this was a bit satisfactory, that the ancestors were not abandoned and that the membrane stayed thin.*

*Dear Missionary, now I want to return to the charged objects. In your religion, objects with intermediary capacity, such as the chalice, the crucifix etc., are also treasured. Objects like these are initiated to be sacred – but are not holy – and to facilitate the connection between God and the individual.*

*I find this idea – that objects can hold value or power in themselves, not visible but still sensed – very interesting. Firstly, the agreement on and trust in the meaning of the object, which the society holds. Secondly, the charging and how the maker takes on this trust. As you understand, I am not that interested in communicating with God, but I am still curious about the intermediation that I think works between individuals as well. As a Maker, an artist, looking at my work from this point of view, I can feel a bit overwhelmed with the responsibility of what can be transferred through my pieces.*

*When reading the book about the Swedish missionaries in the Congo, (Pia Lundqvist 2018), I learned more about why you and your colleagues went there. I can, myself coming from a rural part in the north of Sweden, recognize the seeking of new experiences and knowledge. Aside from the religious aspect of looking for other purposes of living. I now understand that it was not only your devotion to your Faith that made you end up in the Congo and that you also might have contributed to something good, as schools and health care was introduced by the church. And, at least in theory, bringing the concept of everyone's equality before God, which was not even reflected on by the colonizers.*

*Now, I am not as condemning of you, as an individual missionary, as before, but despite of this, the mission system will in my eyes never be justified.*

*When writing this to you, I feel a bit embarrassed, but I do appreciate being able to see the nkisi in the museum. It has ended up here, far away from home, but it probably did in good intent from every person involved in its journey. It is impossible to go back in time and make it right, the only thing we can do is to learn, repair and improve.*

*Despite our different positions, thank you for your time, warm greetings,*

*Mona Wallström*

*December 2019*

*Dear Museum,*

*When walking around the museum, I realize that you are a craft museum. All artefacts are made by hand, by skilled crafts persons. I hadn't really thought of this. All your artefacts are representations of ways of living; objects that have a certain purpose which is agreed upon in the context where they were used. There are no pieces made by a person with their own intentions. The Makers have no names, even though they must have had very important roles in the society.*

*I like museums and I like looking at objects. The object can produce so many thoughts and associations, and awaken curiosity. It does not always create an eagerness for explanation. It is enough in itself, as if the story to be told can be sensed just as well by it's appearance. The act of experiencing the object – imagining how it feels to hold, to smell its scent, see how it is made and imagining it in another time and place – that is what makes the wonder. As a maker, this comes easy for me.*

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder

*In 2013 I went to a lecture with the anthropologist Tim Ingold about art as an investigative action.*

*In my log I wrote this:*

*“he talked about the importance of leaving the path and getting lost, and about knowledge that can “ruin the sight” – to be able to listen to birdsong without necessarily defining the species.”*

*It has stuck in my head since then. This is similar to my approach to museum collections. I must have embraced his lecture and in some way recognizing one of the methods, getting lost, in my practice. Later that year I went to the Medical History Museum: The museum's mission is to “manage and communicate the Western material medicine heritage”.*

*In the log I wrote:*

*“History told through things, not many signs to explain. Encouraging to see the objects as form, construction and color, without knowing what it is.*

*If the object is presented without its purpose (or any information about it), I can give it a new history, built upon my own experience[...]*

*Every artefact in the museum has many stories within it. The first relates to the in the making of it and to the context from which it comes. Then there is the story of its journey, who collected it and moved it from its original home, then the story of how it is displayed. Some of the object's stories are more apparent than others. To distinguish these layers, you either need a lot of information or, which I prefer, time and thought”*

*From the book “Between Memory and Museum – a dialogue with folk and tribal artists” (Wolf & Wolf, 2015 p.32):*

*“When an object is removed from its own contexts it loses implicit associations, and needs labels or captions to place the viewer. On the other hand, if the context of a museum display is broad, discerning viewers can read a more “universal” significance into an image.”*

*In the novel “La vie mode d'emploi” (Perec, 1978) stories about the residents of a house in Paris are told through the objects in their homes.*

*The author indicates, not only that we need to make an image of, first, the object itself and, second, of its mediating qualities. It is interesting that it is credible, that a non-image communicator- the author- uses a non-verbal mediator to tell the story.*

*Doug Bailey refers in a lecture, 2019 to archeology as an interpreting science. Findings at excavations need to be put in context and interpreted, by “not the most creative experts”. Bailey is advocating for more creativity in the act of interpretation in science. In his book “Breaking the Surface” (2018), that he presented at the lecture he collates the archeologist digging holes with artists making holes as a working method. Now, this statement that scientists are interpreters is, when I think about it, obvious, and must apply to most disciplines in science. Everything measured and tested must still be interpreted and the interpretation has to be agreed on. Not until then it is facts.*

*In museums, the time aspect is an extra complication. Information is lost, and there is no one left to ask for the facts. That is, interpreting will always be a part of the perception of artefacts.*

*Don't get me wrong, I'm really interested in receiving knowledge and facts, only advocating an acceptance of a broader view of interpretation and what will become knowledge. It is about relying on the visual object's ability to transfer information, too.*

*The project that I have been working on builds upon the nkisi from the the Congo collection. I named it “A Sense of Awe and Wonder”. The title is linked to these charged artefacts, but also reflects my feelings for you, the museum – it is what I feel when I walk your halls and meet all your objects, that keep telling me their stories.*

*With deep respect and gratitude,*

*Mona Wallström*

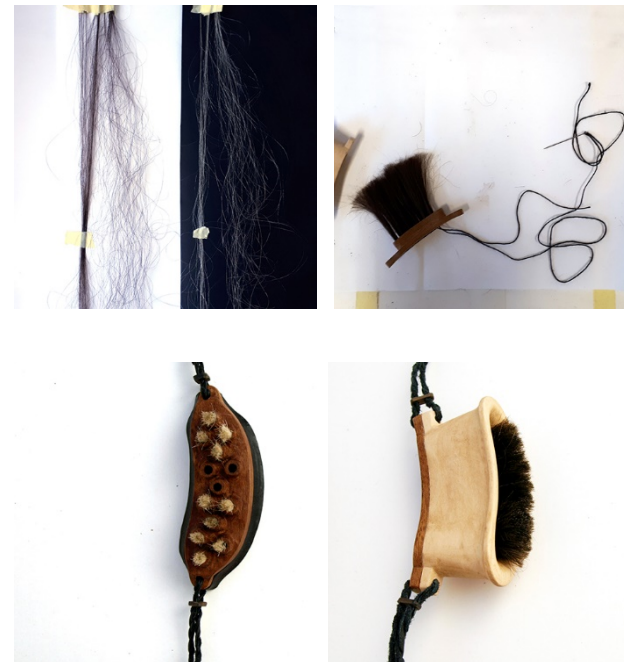


## A Sense of Awe and Wonder



**Figure 9-12.**  
**Process: Charged material.**  
*Natural shaped stones from waterfall close to where I grew up in the north. It does not exist any more, sacrificed for electricity. The stones are set in wood from branches picked by my studio. The natural cracked stones are from where our family spend our summers. They are set in bark from birches from my birthplace. Flax cord is coloured with onion peel from kitchen waist.*

**Figure 13-16.**  
**Process: Charged material.**  
*Jewellery of hair appeared already in the Middel ages, mostly in purpose of worship or mourning. The tradition is still vivid in parts of Sweden. Human hair is the remnants of a person and for ethic reasons I have chosen to work with my own. Gathering fallen hair, sorting in colour and then set in wood using brush binding technique, resulting in "hairbrushes".*





**Figure 17-20.**  
*Process: Charged from folklore. Phenomena in nature have been seen as signs of special quality. During periods of frequent appearing rickets children were pulled through cavities or loops that naturally occurred in trees called “smöjträ”. For the smallest children loops were grown in a small tree and when set in shape cut and put on the breast when feeding. This would prevent the child from sickness. These loops were made in the autumn and harvested in spring. After peeling they were connected with soft skin and flax cord.*

February 2020

*Dear Colleague Art Jeweller,*

*I am just writing you to tell you a bit about my thoughts on working as a jeweller and artist. Working on one's own, making all decisions and keeping motivated is not always smooth sailing and that's fine. And getting lost is part of the game.*

*I was impressed when I heard about a group of artists that bought an old mine in an almost abandoned countryside. The mine is now a cultural centre, built upon a special philosophy. When discussing the development of the centre, and before making any decision the group always take a 5-minute break to consider the question: “Is this meaningful?” In this era – of fast solutions, financial stress and expectations from society where it is impossible not to compare yourself to other people's achievements break to consider this question, might change or strengthen a decision. But giving it this time to reflect and implement is then worth every second.*

*In the project that I am currently working on, I am examining the complexity of the meaning of making, and the object as an intermediary of stories, emotions and experiences. I am suggesting that objects can transfer not-known-but-sensed experiences, that the object itself can communicate. If we only give trust in words for knowledge and scientific correctness we can get caught in fake news as well. We need to encourage understanding other ways of perception and train these skills fully and us see the potentials we have through all our senses.*

*The starting point for my project, is the nkisi from the Congo. They are objects with a certain charge, connected to other dimensions. In relation to this, I want to emphasize that the kind of art work we do today also have an intermediating function in a more existential and social context. The receiver (viewer, user) most likely does not meet the makers. It is then not possible to*

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder

*know if the message sent will be interpreted the way it was intended. On the other hand, this creates a possibility for the receiver to interpret the piece in a way that suits them. Since art does not deal with truth or falsity, I do not regard this as a problem.*

*As a guideline in the project, I used the discussion on artistic research in practical art making written by Nina Bondeson and Marie Holmgren "Tiden som är för handen – om praktisk konststillverkning" (2007 p. 77): "The mythical and mystic potentials in art are not mysterious. They merely stem from our human ability to ask unanswerable questions. All kinds of practical artwork are very potent in these matters, since it, fully or partly, can make its way into existence without any particular obligation to verbal conceptualization." and further "Establishing this research must also imply paying attention to the difference between research through, in and about art and artmaking. Questions and answers, about verbalization, description and knowledge production must be upheld with assistance of Steadfast Uncertainty."*

*When I googled the title of my project "A sense of Awe and Wonder", the search results came from all different fields: psychology, pedagogy, theology, medicine, art (all kinds), etc. as well as some about experienced nature phenomenon, child birth, salvation, healing and so on. To be honest, I would never had chosen this title until I heard a lecture by Ola Sigurdsson about the work in bringing forward the definition of existential health that the World Health Organisation is currently doing. (Well, the definitions are agreed upon, but not as much when it comes to existential or spiritual health). When WHO is stating what existential health is and it should be a possibility for every human, I interpret that awe and wonder is a human right. I have not seen this perspective.*

*I hope that you agree with me that all expressions of art have a purpose of communicating – not to explain or state, but give perspectives. I like to think about my pieces of art as "suggestions" – to reject or embrace. The main reasons for wearing jewellery are: to show alliance, status, memory, as a decoration or for protection or good luck. The last ones,*

*which include amulet and talisman, are not common in contemporary jewellery practice. This kind of jewellery is supposed to be charged in order to protect or give you advantages. I have a feeling that this kind of jewellery has low status among us, probably because their supposed power, the charge, overrules the makers/jewellers own artistic intentions. If this kind of jewellery deals with power, charge, faith, existential meaning, maybe we could think about our practices in a different way.*

*The Nkisi maker in the Congo put a mix of different substances inside the object. This way it became charged. Of course, each substance has a meaning, but the main reason why it is perceived as charged is that the idea of its purpose and power is agreed upon by the community.*

*If this feeling of awe and wonder, this recognition of non-verbal communication, that is finding its way deep into the mind of the viewer, also can be experienced in contact with a piece of art – are we then also chargers? But, what does the charge entail? How did it get into the object, the art piece? What is a charged object today?*

*Now, leaning on the "assistance of Steadfast Uncertainty", I'll say, being makers at least gives us a possibility to charge. In my first art school (preparatory) our teachers, mainly male, maintained the theses of that -art is to really see, the rest is just technique and practical work and that -you need to work really hard, but the piece should look like it was done in a second. I believe that I was guided better by the teacher's pencil correcting my drawing or an approving murmur behind my back. The non-verbal communication has been around long before there was a language.*

*I read a lot, mostly fiction. When reading, I imagine what the characters look like, the landscape, the rooms in which they move, their gestures, the smell and taste of food etc. This is a non-image communication. Even though the author and I do not have the same view of the characters, the transfer of the story is undoubtedly there. It is not precise, but the "un-preciseness" is its advantage. When making my own images the story is not only interpreted, but to some extent also created by me. The story adjusts to me and my experiences, and in this way, I can connect to the story even more.*

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder

*The non-image communication (verbal) we learn and trust as an effective intermediary of information as well as feelings. Maybe we lost a bit of the trust but not necessarily the understanding, of the non-verbal. I am certain that this kind of communication, visual arts, music, dance etc. is valuable when it comes to not-so-precise and co-creative exchanges between humans. I have a complicated relation to things. In 2012 I wrote this in my log: "I don't like to have many things around me either. I feel that the things demand me to use or take care of them. Somehow, they intrude in my daily life and take time and focus from more important chores."*

*A colleague of mine, Linda Tedsdotter is focusing on the artists and the role that the creativity had in this development in her project Apocalypse Insurance-Raft (2019):*

*"- I have to confess that there was a time when I imagined that art is virtuous (even if sometimes dark, depressing or gloomy) and that one way or another it exists to do good. But what if art is the source of all things bad? That it was exactly art, which thousands of years ago furthered greed and selfishness, leading to capitalism and then finally created the foundation for the environmental problems we face today". In "Apocalypse Insurance - Gardening" (2020), she declares that she won't do any artwork that cannot be used in some other purpose.*

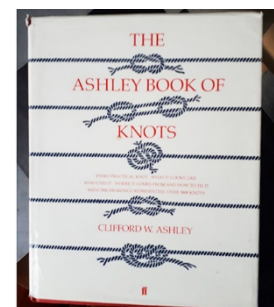
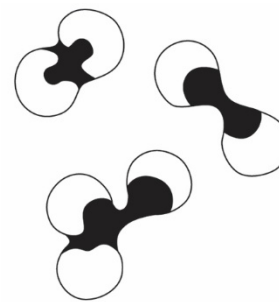
*My production is not big, but still "useless" in the practical sense. This concerns me as well. My strategy is to put so much meaning in each object that they transform from a thing/object to be, as I wrote before, an intermediary between individuals. Sometimes I even think I overdo it, bring too many "stories", so that I just blur the understanding. Anyhow, I really believe that this intermediary possibility is an essential question for an artist: How do I get this piece that I am making to have meaning for someone else?*

*With hope of further dialogue from a devoted, but concerned, fellow jeweller,*

*Mona Wallström*

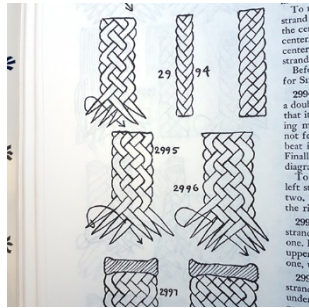
**Figure 21-24.**

**Process: Illustrating a charged moment. Sketches on splitting cells. Visualizing the cell split three dimensional by using two magnifying glasses set in wood from my birth place. Split "cells" are from other types of wood representing different kinds of characteristics. The wooden pieces are held together with silk cord knot from instructions in the Ashley Book of Knots.**





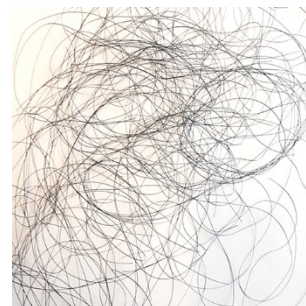
## A Sense of Awe and Wonder



**Figure 29-31.**

**Process:** *Charged with a secret message.*

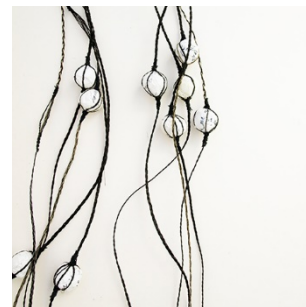
*A secret message to the owner of the wearable object from its maker. The message is written on paper and wrinkled. By wetting the paper, it can be rolled to a small hard ball. The paper ball is set in braided fallen horsehair. To read the message the piece will be destroyed.*



**Figure 25-28.**

**Process:** *Making tool for charging.*

*In order to capture and keep the desirable; happiness, a memory, love or a dead soul etc. these objects can be used as factual or symbolic tool. A butterfly net and a cage made in found horn from reindeer and silk. Silk is knotted and braided from instruction in the Ashley Book of Knots.*



April 2020

Dear Nkisi Maker,

*It has been a while since I wrote, but I have been very occupied with the thought that I brought to you in the last letter; making things and how to charge them in the context I live in.*

*Today, there are still things that are treasured, or charged, and they are most often connected to persons, places and events. There are also others that protect or give guidance or devices for capturing the coveted. These objects have been given, besides the visual appearance, another kind of value: one that is very personal but still, to some extent, comprehended in the society we live in.*

*Despite this, I don't think that the substances that you used to charge the nkisi are as relevant today. Medicine, the curative capacity of which is scientific proven, is trusted in society today. The charging might work without a visible substance but it still needs references to known concepts.*

*Relations are the most important things in our lives, not only our closest family, best friends, colleagues. We worship and admire; we love and commit to persons that we might not even have met. Remains of holy persons have been kept as sacred objects; images of holy persons painted with their eyes following you in the room as a proof of an ever-guarding God. Even things that used to belong to an admired or at least famous person can have a high value. It is as if a touch of divine individual has made the things something else. And in jewellery, there are many examples of this, for mourning; rings with hair from the deceased, the use of parent's rings in the children's marriage, etc.*

*Sometimes I have a sensitivity to places and can react to untold, not-yet-known facts about a place. It is like there is a parallel dimension that emerges in me. I have been travelling a lot and memories of the places that I have visited are more powerful than other experiences during the trip. Today, some of the most famous travel destinations have problems with*

*people taking things from the places with them, like stones, shells and other objects, which will change and eventually destroy these places. Some are already on the point of being ruined and have, due to this, limited the number of visitors or even fully closed.*

*As for the events, they can be societal or personal, and can be connected to relations, big changes or to something you have achieved. We remember where we were when the twin towers in New York were attacked. Those who were in Berlin when the wall fell will remember it forever. These are events that will forever be a part of the story of our time. Being in the right place and doing the right thing can even get you a medal. In war, depending on who's side you are on, in competition measured in comparative numbers; fastest, highest, longest etc.*

*To capture and keep things or creatures, for pleasure or as a symbol of a connection, is common in many cultures. The Romans even had a God, though minor, whose purpose was to be caught. Occasio was the personification of opportunity, luck and favourable moments, was not easy to catch as he/she had only one lock of hair to grip by. Insects have in many cultures been captured as symbols of life, death and resurrection. This passage from larvae, through the pupa's hardened outside, inside transforming and coming out as a fully developed butterfly or beetle, which are collected both alive and dead.*

*Many of the amulets and charms today are used for protection, to prevent evil things from happening. The folklore in Sweden is filled with strange creatures: some evil and some nice. Some you have to treat well to not fall into their disgrace. Some will guard your house or help you find the path. Diseases were signs of disgrace or the evil powers. Some protectors that could be found in nature. When a large hollowness is found in a tree the child is pulled through the hole and will then be protected from rickets. When protecting newborns, a small loop is made of a branch and put on the breast so the child is feeding through the loop. I really like this image of getting protected but such a simple, but poetic act.*

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder

*A secret message can have a romantic glow, as when lovers need to hide their relationship, or cause an intriguing and thrilling excitement, when used by spies. The messages can be clear or coded, but are only for a selected receiver. A mentor can give individual advice, a stanza directed directly into your heart. Randomly found objects or phenomena in nature can by some be seen as omens, of good or bad, or signs from God, and have always been a way for humans to try to understand our existence.*

*In my project “A Sense of Awe and Wonder” I have made suggestions of charged objects. I have tried to use local material as much as I could, preferably without any killing involved, but I haven’t fully succeeded. Wood, birch bark, stones and reindeer horn are found in nature, leather (local) and silk (imported) means that creatures were sacrificed, but at least the hair from horses and humans fall off frequently, no harm done. The main components of cord (flax) paper (wood) and glass (quartz sand) might be local, but in processing the origin is lost. Even so, these materials have associative qualities, related to daily life, that were useful for the pieces.*

*So, I made these 6 wearable objects suggesting what a charged object can be today:*

**The Only** is made of wood with human remains, in this case my own hair as remains from the dead are, in my society, even too charged.

**This Place** is made from natural shaped stones from Gallejaur falls (close to where I was born and raised, now dead, sacrificed for electricity) set in branches from where I live now.

**This Moment** is illustrated by a cell division, a reminder of the birth of my children.

**Capturer** is an intermediary of capturing the desirable illustrated by butterfly net and a cage.

**Preventers** is made by branches traditionally in Scandinavian folklore called “smöjträ”, used for preventing rickets

**Messages** is made with secret messages written on paper, wrinkled and set with horsehair.

*Thank you for speaking to me through your nkisi. I have probably misunderstood a great deal, not only by living in another time and place, but, I think, mostly because my interpretation is built on my experiences and imagination.*

*But from one maker to another, aren’t these our best assets?*

*With great gratitude, awe and wonder,*

*Mona Wallström*

*P.S. The image shows my pieces worn by colleagues from my art community D.S.*



©Johan Wingborg

## A Sense of Awe and Wonder



***The Only***  
Wearable object  
connected to a person.  
Wood, human hair,  
leather.

***This Moment***  
Wearable object  
connected to a specific  
moment, illustrated  
with a cell split.  
Magnifying glass,  
wood, silk cord.



***This Place***  
Wearable object  
connected to a place.  
Wood, natural shaped  
stones from Gallejaur,  
birch bark, flax.

***Capturer***  
Wearable object  
serving as a tool for  
capturing and keeping  
the desirable.  
Horn from reindeer,  
silk cord.



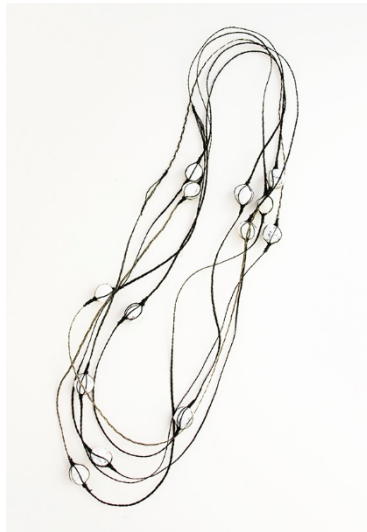




**Preventers**

*Wearable object with  
11 connected “smöjträ”  
for protecting from  
illness.*

*Wood from cultivated  
thin branches, thin  
leather, flax cord.*



**Messages**

*Wearable object with  
secret messages.*

*Paper, waterproof ink,  
fallen horsehair.*

## CONCLUSION

---

Most of the things we own do not mean very much to us. In a sense they are nothing (no thing) as they can disappear without any existential trace of loss. Some losses might only remain as a feeling of lost monetary value. Charged objects have another kind of value: personal or communal, and related to the intermediated content of the object. Through the letters to a Nkisi Maker, a Collector, a Museum and a Fellow Jeweller it becomes obvious that there are many stories and levels in the content added, from the makers intention through different events to the final recipient. Every level adds perspectives that are included in the interpretation of the object. This non-verbal communication through an object is what we, as jewellers and artists, do – tell a story in a material format. To trust and encourage this ability, applies to both the maker and the receiver. The possibility of intermediating information and perspectives through an object is, somehow, disregarded today. However, this form of communication has an important ability to link people and cultures together. And, by using “un-preciseness” in the transmission, the receivers can then also be co-creators through their own experiences.

## REFERENCES

African Arts, Kavuna Simon & MacGaffey, Vol 28-2  
1995:51

Ashley, Crafford W. (1947). *The Ashley Book of Knots*.  
Faber and Faber Limited.

Bailey, Doug. (2018) *Breaking the surface*. Oxford  
University Press

Bondeson, Nina & Holmgren, Marie. (2007) *Tiden som  
är för handen - Om praktisk konststillverkning*.  
HOOPS!

Bornemark, Jonna. (2018). *Det omätbaras renässans –  
En uppgörelse med pedanternas herravälde*.  
Volante.

Habib Engqvist, Jonathan & Hjertström Lappalainen,  
Lars-Erik. (2018) *BIG DIG – Om samtidskonst och  
passivitet*. CL(P) Works

Häggglund, Martin. (2019). *This Life – Why Mortality  
Makes Us Free*. Profile Books

Eccher, Peter (image) & Cornell, Peter (text) (2019)  
*Uppenbarelseboken*. ©Peter Eccher.

Ingold, Tim. (2013). *Making- Anthropology,  
Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. Routledge.

Ingold, Tim, lecture (2013) *Scenkonstvandring*  
arranged by Adas Theater, Konstepidemin, Göteborg  
Sweden, Lecure

Lundqvist, Pia. (2018). *Ett motsägelsefullt möte –  
Svenska missionärer och bakongo i Fristaten Kongo*.  
Nordic Academic Press.

Motturi, Alexander.(2007). *Etnotisism – En essä om  
mångkultur, tystnad och begäret efter mening*. Glänta  
Production.

Perec, Georges. (1978). *La vie mode d'emploi*. Hachette

Raworth, Kate.(2017) *Doughnut economics. Seven  
ways Think Like a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economist*. Chelsea  
Green Publishing.

Sigurdsson, Ola. (2016) *Existential Health.  
Philosophical and historical perspectives*  
LIR. Journal (16) 6. Article

Tedsdotter, Linda (2019) *Apocalypse Insurance-Raft*.  
*Porin kulttuurisäätö collective, Finland*. Artwork

Tedsdotter, Linda (2020) *Apocalypse Insurance-  
Gardening*. *Gotheburg Arthall, Sweden*. Artwork

Wallström, Mona (2017) *Regarding House no.10*.  
Konstepidemin Publishing House

Wolf, Arun & Wolf, Gita. (Eds.). (2015). *Between  
Memory and Museum – in dialogue with folk and tribal  
artists*. Tara Books.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

*Mona Wallström*

*mona.wallstrom@konstepidemin.se*

Swedish jeweller and artist. MFA from School of Design and Craft at Gothenburg University where she later in 1995-2001 was Head of department. Co-founder of Hnoss Gallery, now Hnoss Initiative. Her work often refers to memory, history and storytelling and is shown in several exhibitions, national and international. This research was made during 2019-20 studies at Research Lab Craft! at Konstfack Stockholm. [www.monawallstrom.se](http://www.monawallstrom.se)



Journal of Jewellery Research

[www.journalofjewelleryresearch.org](http://www.journalofjewelleryresearch.org)

ISSN 2516-337X

Loughborough University &  
Northumbria University.

First published in May 2021,  
UK.

Copyright© Journal of Jewellery  
Research and the author.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair  
dealing for the purposes of study,  
research, criticism or review, as  
permitted under the applicable  
copyright legislation, no part of this  
work may be reproduced by any  
process without written permission  
from the publisher or author.

For permissions and other inquiries,  
please contact the editors:  
<editorsjojr@gmail.com>

Journal of Jewellery Research is a  
double blind peer-reviewed research  
journal supported by an International  
Editorial Advisory Group.