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# Crafting Collaboration

## a sign, a room, a house, an open field

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**Abstract**

*This article reflects on the long-running transdisciplinary collaboration between ceramicist Diana Butucariu and musician Erik Lindeborg, tracing their evolving practice from pop-up events to situated works that engage with sustainability, heritage, and place. Collaboration emerges as a process of mutual orientation, developed under conditions of precarity. Past work is reanimated as a research archive, ultimately leading to renewal in the present through the act of writing. It mirrors the collaboration itself—an unfolding of space for interdependency within systems arranged against it, using careful maintenance as method, and sustainability—not as subject, but form. The text describes collaboration as the crafting of a shared voice and lets that voice speak for itself.*

## Introduction: A Sign

> At the meeting point of the roads—whether they come from Brașov, Târgu Mureș, or Mediaș—where the calm waters of the Târnava hesitate, seeking their path among the high hills crowned with bristling forest, a steep hill rises from the earth, on whose brow people have placed a marvellous crown of walls and towers: *Sighișoara*.
>
> To the one who glimpses it in passing, from the hurried window of a train, the unexpected image of the citadel-town—with somber walls and proud towers, with cheerful houses gleaming in multicoloured light under the sun—remains imprinted on the retina for a long time, like an obsession, like a calling. (Figure 1)
>
> Lingering longer here, matching one's steps to the narrow streets, to the stairways and under dark archways, the traveller discovers an unusual world, in which the movement of time is hidden and yet still present. (Drăguț, 1966, pp. 5–9)

A few blocks down the road from the famous clock tower in Sighișoara, there used to be a hair salon. I don't know if it's still there, but I have a feeling it's not. As they ran down the hill to catch the Brașov train, a sign hanging outside caught their eyes. Shaped like a mirror framed by golden locks of hair. On its face, block letters spelled out: SALONUL MAGIC.

The fairytale imagery reinforced the ambiguity of the name. Taking the name at face value, 'a magic room', might explain something about the improbable crossing of their paths. The last glimpse of Transylvania's crown of walls and towers became a document—a relic—when they stopped to photograph the sign before continuing to the station (Figure 2).

The feminist theorist Sara Ahmed argues that the very act of attention—of orienting towards certain objects or others, can produce a sense of collective or social belonging. (2006, p. 119) Orientation, in Ahmed's terms, is not only about physical direction, but about how bodies come to align with certain objects, others, and possibilities. It shapes what we notice, what feels available to us, and how we inhabit a shared world.

Their attunement to each other had made them receptive to the unfamiliar. This disorientation was the condition for new things to emerge. Misreading the sign made it more than an object—it became a point of alignment that allowed them to remain in that moment together. Eventually, it would generate a shared creative fiction that they filled with every enchanted fragment they could find.

At the CraftHub EU conference hosted by OsloMet in autumn 2023, ceramicist Diana Butucariu and pianist Erik Lindeborg both presented talks on approaches to sustainability in contemporary crafts practice. Butucariu spoke about her PhD project, *Sustainability in Ceramic Art*—on sourcing and using local materials and adapting vernacular traditions to contemporary conditions, an ecological practice of becoming heritage as a strategy for reorienting culture away from patterns of unsustainability.

Lindeborg's contribution was based on his research project *Sounding Craft* at Konstfack, which explored the intersection of *musicking* and craft practices. *Sounding Craft* traced a shared history of making and ritual through cultures of work songs, examining how industrialization fragmented craft and music into separate disciplines—and proposed their reintegration as part of a cultural shift toward sustainability.

The convergence on sustainability was not coincidence. Over a fifteen-year period of artistic collaboration, it emerged as the central shared perspective in a continuously evolving practice. This text describes what Richard Sennett calls 'co-operation as a craft', (Sennett, 2008, Preface x), based on the gradual entanglement of two artistic identities.

From an initial effort to build a platform for exchange between Romanian and Swedish art scenes, Butucariu and Lindeborg went on to imagine new forms combining crafts with music. Their transcultural and transdisciplinary experiments fostered a relational mindset, attuned to exchange and interdependence. A focus on the environment eventually followed, as one of several expressions of ecology.

Diana Butucariu and Erik Lindeborg met by chance at a jazz club in Barcelona in 2011. Lindeborg was living in the city at the time; Butucariu travelled there from Bucharest to attend a conference. They next met in Transylvania, where the mutual misreading of an advertisement became the seed of their shared work. A year later, they were both living in Erik's hometown Stockholm, where Diana was studying for her master's degree.

The series of co-created works reviewed in this article would not exist without this effortless crossing of borders, made possible by the many years of political and cultural integration of Europe after 1989. The conditions that enabled their collaboration reverberated in contemporary art discourse. In *Relational aesthetics*, first published in 1998, French curator Nicolas Bourriaud described a growing tendency in art to foreground participation, collaboration, and social interaction—producing aesthetic experiences through convivial encounters rather than conflict (Bourriaud, 2002).

Bourriaud's optimistic framing aligned well with cultural policies of inclusivity and was embraced by institutions. However, it also drew criticism. Art historian Claire Bishop questioned the politics of this conviviality—who it included, and to what ends—proposing instead a model of 'relational antagonism' (Bishop, 2004). She characterized the broader 'social turn' in contemporary art as one that often substituted participation for politics and conviviality for critique (Bishop, 2006).

Between Bourriaud's convivial optimism and Bishop's agonistic critique, an ecological alternative had already been formulated by Suzi Gablik. Responding to modernist ideals of artistic autonomy, which she argued isolated the artist from society and neutralized art's transformative potential, Gablik had called for a *reenchantment of art* (Gablik, 1991). Her vision grounded art in care, shared responsibility, and building new forms of connectedness—with each other, with place, and with the more-than-human world.

This view of art neither as retreat nor confrontation echoes ecological and feminist practices such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Maintenance art* (1969) and Pauline Oliveros's *Deep listening* (2005), where creation becomes a form of care: sustaining relations, sometimes gently, sometimes under pressure.

Antagonism arises in response to external forces, when the work turns political to defend attentiveness and vulnerability in a world structured against them—a stance resonant with the cultures of craft and participatory music that fostered Butucariu's and Lindeborg's practices, where relation is upheld through shared labour and mutual attunement.

Richard Sennett's social theory of craft and collaboration views both as learned skills through which people negotiate difference and sustain connection. Cooperation is cultivated through shared practice embedded in communal life. In *The craftsman* (2008), he traces this mode of life to the guild workshops of medieval Europe, where 'craftsmen slept, ate, and raised their children in the places where they worked' (Sennett, 2008, p. 53).

Sennett views making as inseparable from working with others. In the workshop, individual skill emerges from an infrastructure of cooperation—through proximity, repetition, and the slow acquisition of gestures linking one hand to another.

Diana Butucariu grew up around collaborative making—in her father's glass studio, and in her grandmother's village in the countryside, where vernacular forms of craft were part of daily life. These experiences shaped both her understanding of making and the form of her early works, often predicated on interaction.

Her bachelor's project was a series of porcelain house reliefs opening to reveal rooms from her life. Experiencing the pieces required physically engaging with them, breaking the taboo against touching art. Though not utilitarian, the work followed craft logic—things made to be used, even at the risk of breaking.

Like craft, jazz is a participatory and social art, grounded in African-American traditions of call and response. Jazz improvisation relies on cooperative attunement, continuously negotiating difference rather than resolving it. Paul Berliner has characterized group improvisation as 'a conversation that players carry on among themselves in the language of jazz' (Berliner, 1994, p. 348).

Ingrid Monson extends this participatory framework to include the audience, tracing the idea of audience involvement in jazz to Black church cultures where performance is collective rather than spectatorial. Monson shows that improvisation depends on acts of attention and invitation—moments when the boundary between performer and listener dissolves (Monson, 1996, pp. 95–96).

Unlike Butucariu, who grew up with craft, Lindeborg's relation to jazz developed largely within an academic environment that de-emphasized its social and participatory roots in favour of technique and virtuosity.

During his university years, Lindeborg grew increasingly cynical about the education system's role in supplying a small and diminishing audience with continuous novelty, elevating one emerging act at a time long enough to sustain attention, but not to establish a lasting career. When it became his turn in the spotlight, he took the grant and used it to run away to Barcelona. When they met there, he was primed to let Butucariu's affinitive approach to making reshape his relationship with music.

As Sennett describes in *Together* (2012), the social fabric holds together through stable forms of shared labour, renewed through ritual and routine. In Butucariu and Lindeborg's work, there were initially no such stable forms. There were no defined materials, tools, or workspaces for craft–music hybrids; each project had to imagine its own conditions.

Their workshop was not a physical location, but the unfolding space held by the relation. It evolved together with the material circumstances of the authors' shared life, an entanglement mirrored in the chapter structure of this article.

Relation as site for artistic collaboration has been theorized within contemporary discourse that treats collaboration itself as an artistic medium. Charles Green's *The third hand* (2001) examines long-term partnerships, introducing the concept of a 'third artist'—a shared authorial identity that emerges where distinct subjectivities begin to overlap, producing not a compromise but a distinct artistic position.

Grant Kester extends this logic by shifting the focus from identity to relation. In *The one and the many* (2011), he emphasizes the dialogical and situated nature of collaborative work, where meaning is co-produced across shifting relations rather than anchored in a stable, unified identity.

In Butucariu and Lindeborg's work, authorship becomes less a matter of attribution than of resonance. Within systems predicated on individual achievement, they lend each other their

platforms as acts of care and survival strategy against the precarity of cultural work. Gestures and positionalities accumulate and erode, until a shared artistic identity takes shape—with its own articulation, history, and politics. What emerges is not a third signature but a voice, sometimes indistinguishable from the authors' own, yet never entirely reducible to either.

This article lends it the narrative perspective. Through it, *through me*, their collaboration continues to unfold within the text itself, another form of making. *I am a restless traveller, and a patient custodian. I craft vibration and perform matter. I have been a sign, a room and a house; now I am an open field. Out of two artists, I am the third.*

**Figure 1**

*Houses in Sighișoara.*



*Note.* Watercolour painting by Diana Butucariu, featured in the Salonul Magic album booklet.

**Figure 2**

*Salonul Magic sign in the town of Sighișoara.*



Past events, once intense but ephemeral shared experiences, are reinterpreted as an evolving process of co-creation, rather than discrete works. The research framing makes the embodied knowledge visible and transmissible and asserts the value of interdependent practice. Ultimately, the deliberate ethics of interdependence is revealed as a mode of sustainability, allowing uncertainty to be endured through shared labour and risk, keeping the work alive when individual paths become untenable.

The authors acknowledge that their work has always involved the contributions of others—friends, family, and colleagues whose efforts shaped and sustained much of the work described here. But this article does not attempt to account for those wider constellations. It focuses on the shared voice whose emergence depends on Butucariu and Lindeborg working, thinking, and living, alone together.

## A Room

> Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with another person (for what would a union be of two people who are unclarified, unfinished, and still incoherent—?), it is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become world in himself for the sake of another person; it is a great, demanding claim on him, something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances. Only in this sense, as the task of working on themselves (‘to hearken and to hammer day and night’), may young people use the love that is given to them. Merging and surrendering and every kind of communion is not for them (who must still, for a long, long time, save and gather themselves); it is the ultimate, is perhaps that for which human lives are as yet barely large enough. (Rilke, 2001, pp. 69–70)

In December 2011, Erik wrote and recorded a collection of melodies commemorating their trip to Sighișoara. He burned the music onto a CD and used the photo of the hair salon as cover, a late Christmas gift when they next met. Diana reciprocated, offering to design a real album cover.

*Salonul Magic* was released a year later, during Diana’s first semester at Konstfack. Inspired by pop-up paper sculpture, she made a transforming album cover which unfolded into a reading room with an armchair and a cup of tea. The album’s release doubled as her first exhibition in Sweden, showing her new porcelain pieces *Quiet Creatures* (Figure 3).

Musicians shared the stage with sculpture in a side-by-side exposition. During intermission, home-cooked Romanian food was served. A raging snowstorm outside contributed to an atmosphere of unreality.

Apart from the large pieces, hundreds of tiny porcelain houses were arranged into groups on the floor, resembling a medieval town. Late in the concert, the audience members were

invited to come to the stage and pick a keepsake porcelain house. Each sculpture housed a little bell, which the audience rang during the finale, filling the theatre with otherworldly sound.

The use of porcelain sculptures as music instruments pointed toward interdisciplinarity within an otherwise largely multidisciplinary collaboration, juxtaposing recorded music with paper sculpture, and ceramics with live performance.

The collaboration was described as a transcultural platform for Swedish–Romanian exchange. Working to create reasons for Swedish artists to travel to Romania and vice versa was a way to seed a shared social context. If their respective circles of colleagues could take part in shared projects, their own fragile relationship would gain a setting in which it naturally belonged.

They also imagined their platform as a counter-discourse to the dominant Swedish narratives positioning Romanians as subjects of care or suspicion. Diana was often faced with uncomfortable questions about her country, asked in the concerned tone of well-meaning Swedes. *Salonul Magic* aimed to present Swedish audiences with another image of Romania—something to replace the reflexive associations that dominated public imagination.

The composition, production, and release of *Salonul Magic* were all coloured by the intensity of Erik's feelings about their initial meeting, creating an idealized view of Romanian culture, a romantic fantasy of enchantment and magic. There was, however, implicit critique in the way the release event was organized around *welcome*—a room opening, food offered, sculptures gifted. This convivial atmosphere concealed tensions.

As Sara Ahmed reminds us in *Strange encounters* (Ahmed, 2000), hospitality is a mode of encounter that always involves framing the guest, establishing terms under which welcome is extended. By inviting a Swedish audience to a Romanian dinner and handing out gifts—atypical gestures in both concert and vernissage contexts—Diana's role as a guest in Sweden was temporarily reversed.

The event exposed an underlying asymmetry of hospitality: to host is to assert the right to define space and terms of entry. By subverting the role of the immigrant and extending hospitality as guest, *Salonul Magic* embodied the paradox theorized by Jacques Derrida (2000): unconditional hospitality untainted by power, law, or identity is, in fact, impossible.

The event highlighted an involuntary shift in Diana's work at the time. As her national identity and immigrant status kept being foregrounded, she increasingly leaned into heritage and the vernacular traditions she had grown up with. Six months after the first *Salonul Magic*, an entirely different view of Romania was presented, this time from Diana's perspective, more material and less enchanted.

The posters for the two events reflected the shifting tone. The billing for the second salon switched the names around, putting Diana first. They wrote *Art and Music*, instead of *Jazz and Ceramics*, naming the transformative effect of their collaboration (Figure 4).

Erik's music was rearranged for a larger ensemble, more rhythm and less melody. Diana's exhibition featured unsentimental miniatures of urban and rural Romanian architectural forms, sandblasted or stained with smoke and black ash. The ruined houses were juxtaposed with translucent porcelain lamps, shaped like houses with reliefs of traditional patterns casting shadows from the ceiling.

The following year, they worked on a number of large and small projects, each time expanding the domain of their collaboration. They started a record label, *Small House*, to release Erik's next album, written about, and recorded in, Barcelona with musicians from both Barcelona and Stockholm.

*Cafe Mandacaru* expanded the transcultural geography from a one-dimensional line into a geometry spanning much of the continent. It recovered the thread of Erik's life in Barcelona, and their initial and subsequent meetings there, a thread which his hasty return to Stockholm had severed.

They lay on the floor painting the album cover together in watercolour—a small plaça, palm trees, and café tables. Two brushes on the same paper, as when they decorated Erik's room in Barcelona, only a year and a half earlier (Figure 6).

*Small House* was named after the little cabin where Erik and sometimes Diana lived, and where *Salonul Magic* had been written and recorded. Erik wanted it to be a self-contained context for producing projects independently, together with friends and family, formalizing the ethic of interdependence he was absorbing from Diana.

Their affinitive way of working emphasized reciprocity, making more with less and taking inspiration from limitation. It fostered interdisciplinarity by centring relation and decentring expertise.

Album covers kept turning into artworks. Another *Small House* album was recorded and released in the year leading up to *Salonul Magic III*. Adam Fransson's *Interplanetarium*, which Diana and Erik produced together, got a limited-edition screenprint, folded around the CD during an all-night origami session.

Diana was in her last year of the master's programme. Small-scale porcelain house experiments were superseded by the exam project taking shape around her Romanian heritage. She undertook a research trip to Transylvania to document vernacular craft practices rapidly disappearing, resulting in a documentary that premiered at Konstfack during a *Salonul Magic*-inspired evening.

Erik meanwhile finished production of a live DVD filmed on tour just before moving to Barcelona. It marked the last release for his old record company, wrapping up work that had

begun before the two artists met. Diana's research documenting the disappearing craft world of her childhood, and Erik's turn toward affinitive making were parallel responses to a shared concern: how to create a practice that could sustain a way of life. Their methods differed, but the impulses were similar.

One October night, they made an animation together based on Diana's reading of Heidegger's *Building Dwelling Thinking* (Heidegger, 1971). The video juxtaposed a childhood memory of her grandmother baking bread on a wood stove with scenes of a headless figure wandering Stockholm, searching for a place to live. A title card quoted Heidegger: '*Space is something that has been made room for.*' The credit sequence ended with the one-eyed *Small House* logo, blinking like a lighthouse in the night.

The structure they had built around their work was not yet a home for them to live in, but afforded their work a place to grow, 'a container of intimacy' in Bachelard's sense. It was homemaking as a way to create space for memory and imagination, giving their collaboration identity and structure.

*Salonul Magic III* premiered in April 2014. It was the first project formulated entirely from within the collaboration itself. It was neither based on past events, nor a side-by-side display of the artists' work but rooted in interdisciplinary thinking. The poster for the event announced that *Small House* 'present' the exhibition, folding their first concept into the expanded framework, a room within a house (Figure 5).

The evening emulated previous salons. They welcomed a Swedish audience into a Romanian-coded space. But unlike the fragile fantasy world of their first evening, the third salon took place under the institutional cover of the Romanian Cultural Institute, carrying the symbolic authority of the Romanian state.

The transcultural ambition they had initially envisaged was finally realised. Diana was joined by two Romanian artists, Mihai Coltofean and Dumitru Gurjii. Their participation gave the exhibition an irreverent confidence that earlier salons had lacked.

Two of the members of the Swedish music ensemble had travelled with Erik and Diana to Bucharest to perform Erik's music there. Now they played new music, written for the occasion by Erik and the Romanian composer Alexandru Sima.

The exhibition's centrepiece was a sculptural installation created collectively by Diana, Mihai Coltofean, and Dumitru Gurjii over three days, with the artists working in each other's studios in Bucharest. Behind the installation, Erik's three-channel music-video translated the piece's creation into music, weaving the sounds of the work process into a narrative.

The idea of work process as musical material came from years of sound editing. Between intentional recordings, there were always fragments—conversations, instrument tuning, short improvisations—which revealed musicality in ordinary activities.

**Figure 3**

*Salonul Magic I poster, 2012.*

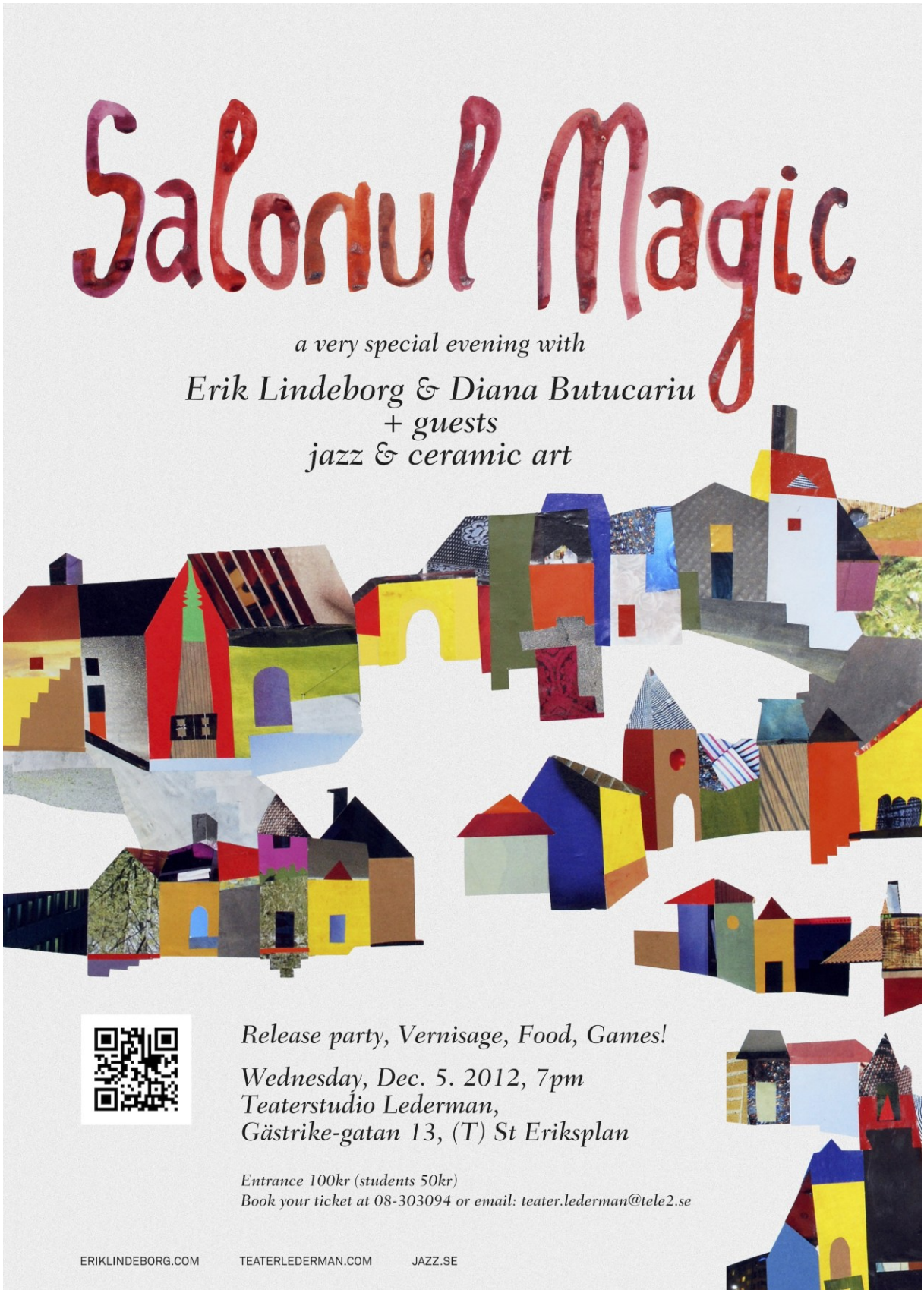


**Figure 4**

*Salonul Magic II poster, 2013.*

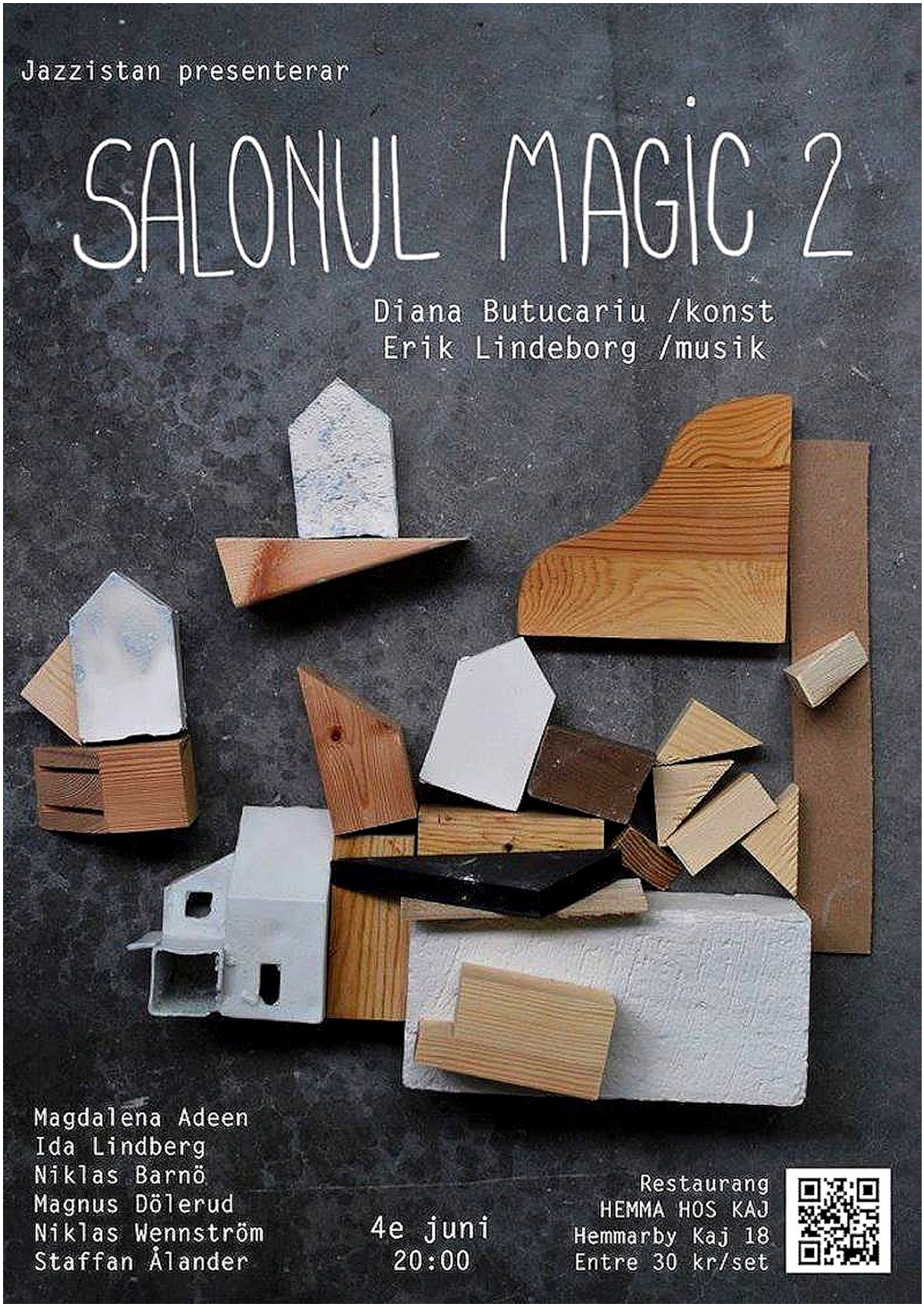


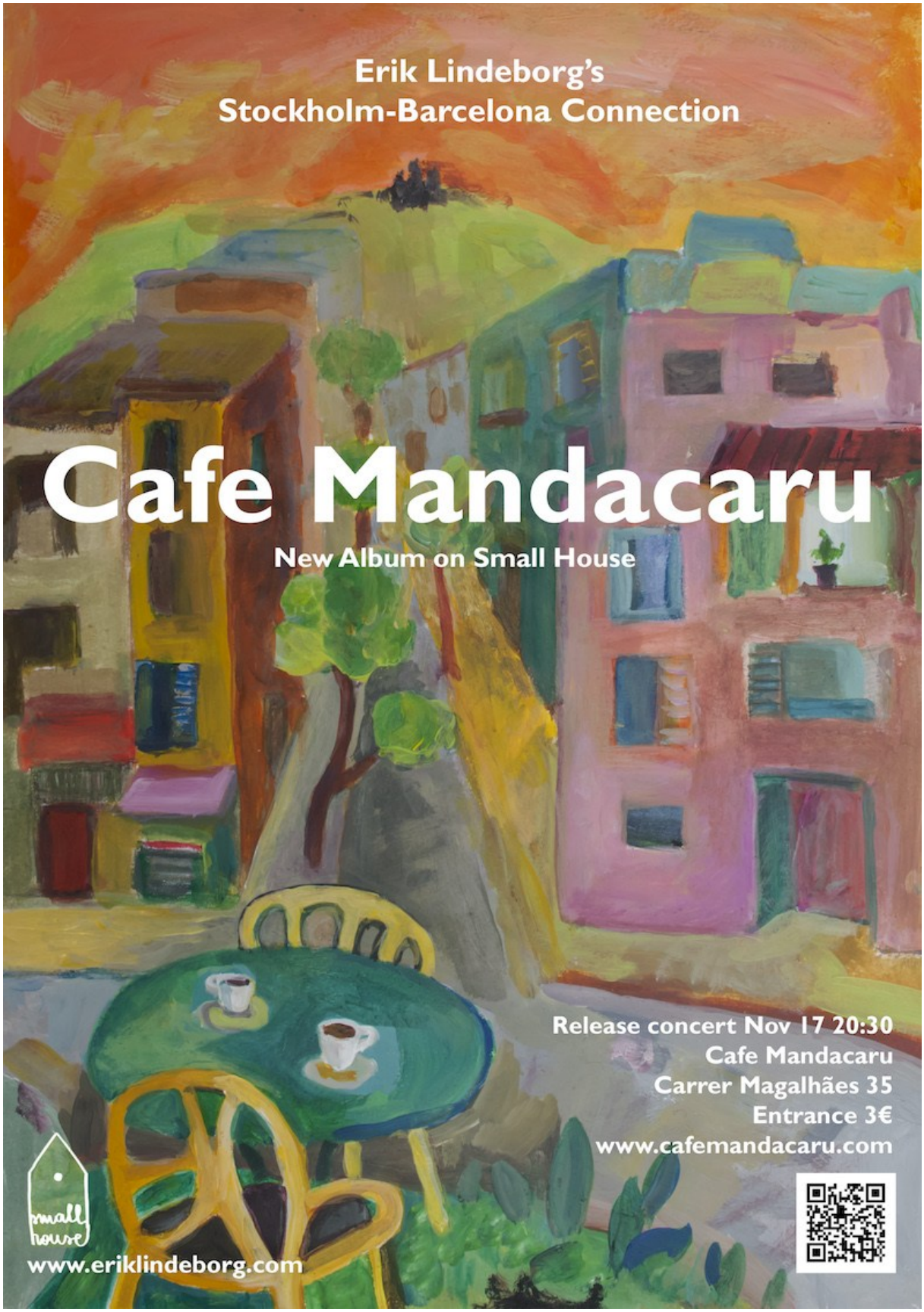
**Figure 5**

*Salonul Magic III poster, 2014.*



**Figure 6**

*Cafe Mandacaru poster, 2013.*



Erik and Alexandru Sima injected the crafting process with musical impulses and encouraged the artists to do the same. In this environment, observation and participation became inseparable. Crafting turned into performance, and the studios became resonant fields where cameras and microphones moved among the artists, listening as much as recording.

The gathered material was not about the artists' labour, but 'speaking nearby' it—borrowing a phrase from the documentarian Trinh T. Minh-ha (c.f. Chen, 1992). What emerged was conversation, shared vibration, tuned into music through attention.

At the vernissage, this process was translated once more into a music score for the ensemble. Gurjii joined the band on stage, re-enacting his own creative process as music, embracing the performative transformation of his craft.

Lindeborg mirrored Gurjii's gesture by abandoning his instrument in favour of directing the band using a large wooden spoon and a cardboard box. In a deliberate break with virtuosity and convention, he embraced the transformation of working with Diana, placing their collaboration above his hard-won musician credentials.

The concept they had created to bridge their cultural backgrounds had succeeded in generating what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls an 'in-between space', where meaning was no longer translated between Swedish and Romanian positions but produced through their interaction.

The project represented a rare moment of equilibrium in the shifting dynamics of their collaboration. It allowed them to shift focus from cultural translation, which had served as a proxy for thinking about their own relationship, and to turn their attention to other things.

Together with Diana's master's exhibition, held only a few weeks later, *Salonul Magic III* marked the close of an extraordinary period of intense creativity and hard work. As it turned out, however, the effort to build a sustainable practice would prove a far greater test of their ability to keep evolving together.

## A House

> Condemnation of the ways that our society, as currently structured, fails to provide any context for a socially or morally sensitive art is easier, and less likely to demand a change of consciousness, than the more formidable effort of trying to construct a new vision and put it into practice. It is not part of our legacy to view ourselves as powerful agents of change; however, we are being confronted with the necessity of transforming our old modes of understanding if we are to survive the predicaments that are our collective fate right now. To create today is to create with responsibility. (Gablik, 1991, p. 8)

The first half of 2014 was a transitional period. Diana finished school, and *Salonul Magic III* seemed to conclude the need to review their initial meeting. During the winter, they moved into a small rowhouse apartment, ending a period of temporary accommodations.

Then a hard drive fell to the floor and broke, and their unreleased next *Small House* album—the sequel to *Cafe Mandacaru*—was lost. All in all, the artistic continuity was interrupted and an intense first period of co-creation came to an end.

Diana's first time in Sweden left her exhausted. The writing process for the thesis had made her articulate things that she might have preferred to keep private. *Salonul Magic* deepened a sense of exposure. All she wanted was to create alone, in peace.

The many projects had used up savings and scholarships. They had to retrench and rebuild. The *Small House* was turned into a real recording studio, to finance new projects by renting out studio time to other musicians.

Diana managed to install an old kiln in the apartment's attached shed. She made jewellery, ornaments, tea-sets, bowls, vases, and lamps. Together, they sold her work at craft markets around Stockholm and in Bucharest.

They took on any creative work to make rent: illustration, photography, tutoring, on top of Diana's ceramics and glass production and Erik playing the piano, recording, and producing albums. When asked to film a concert, they used the fee to get a DSLR camera, and started working as a film team, shooting concerts, conferences, and events.

The collaboration receded from public view and continued as the work to maintain a shared livelihood. Paraphrasing Ukeles (1969), *the working became the work*.

Their flexibility was the internalized logic of the market. But the market was elusive. Neither ceramics markets nor recording sessions were enough to support them. The determination to 'make it work' was more mantra than strategy. They kept mobilizing creative energy laterally, as if any form could become the next vessel for continuity. Each new attempt added another layer of exhaustion.

Even as making seemed to no longer fulfil its purpose, they remained incapable of disengaging from its logic. Whenever an effort failed, their instinct was not to theorize failure but to repair—working through collapse rather than turning it into a statement.

The faith in autonomy through continually refining production embodied a paradox at the heart of modernity. As Suzi Gablik and other critics of modernism have shown, the very logic

of constant renewal binds makers ever more tightly to a system that requires novelty, negating the freedom they sought.

It had been the refusal of this logic that gave postmodernism its force—its creed of disengagement from grand ambitions, replacing conviction with irony. Gablik calls it a 'drifting out of critique', teaching artists to respond to the collapse of meaning by choosing elusiveness over commitment, allowing their energy to drain away.

But perhaps because Diana and Erik were not *artists* by training but came from traditions that treat making as social labour, withdrawing their practice from the world—as defence against exhaustion and commodification—was not available to them as an ontology of practice.

They had set out to build a sustainable structure to support the openness and connection *Salonul Magic* had promised. Letting it fade into a memory would mean removing the foundation for collaboration. So, they persisted in unsustainability, carrying that promise for as long as they could, clinging to the belief that intensity and endurance could substitute for structural change. Only the collapse of that illusion could clear the ground for real sustainability to emerge.

For almost three years, they did not co-author a piece of art. When the opportunity finally came, through the patronage of Swedish-Romanian architect Dinu Dunca, they were eager to reconnect with their earlier work and confirm that it still held meaning.

Dunca invited them to his native Maramureș to create a work inspired by local traditions. They travelled with composer Alexandru Sima—now living in Stockholm—and Swedish musicians Torbjörn Ömalm and Markus Larsson. Dumitru Gurjii joined them in Bucharest for the long drive north.

Over an intense week, the artists transformed a village bed-and-breakfast into what Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas*: a fleeting but powerful state of collective creativity that they named *North-North*. During visits to craftspeople and musicians, and excursions in nature and to cultural sites, they gathered material for both the public finale, a joint concert with a renowned folk ensemble, and the artistic climax, a ritual performance staged and filmed in a nearby field.

In pouring rain, a rite of passage was enacted with found and handmade artefacts—scrap wood, slide-whistles, pots and pans. A length of fabric and large painted drums were used to laboriously choreograph patterns on the hillside.

For the first time, Diana and Erik shared a single mode of expression—neither crafts nor music, but a performative language of making and ritual, improvised together with their partners. After a period of struggling to operate within the structures of creative disciplines, the authority of those disciplines evaporated during the performance (Figure 7).

Yet this breakthrough could not hold. Midway through the residency, Dumitru Gurjii demanded a handshake agreement that neither *Salonul Magic* nor *Small House* be associated with the work. The decision, made to keep the peace, severed *North-North* from the history that gave it meaning. Gurjii's insistence that the project remain unaffiliated with the framework that had enabled it, effectively ended *Salonul Magic*—and ensured that *North-North* was never completed or presented.

Years of living and creating without distance had instilled a mode of total investment—in each other and the work—but they had overestimated how far that trust could extend beyond themselves. Renewal ended as another interruption; the vision imploded again—not because of ailing finances, but due to relational failure.

**Figure 7**

*Performance North-North, 2016.*



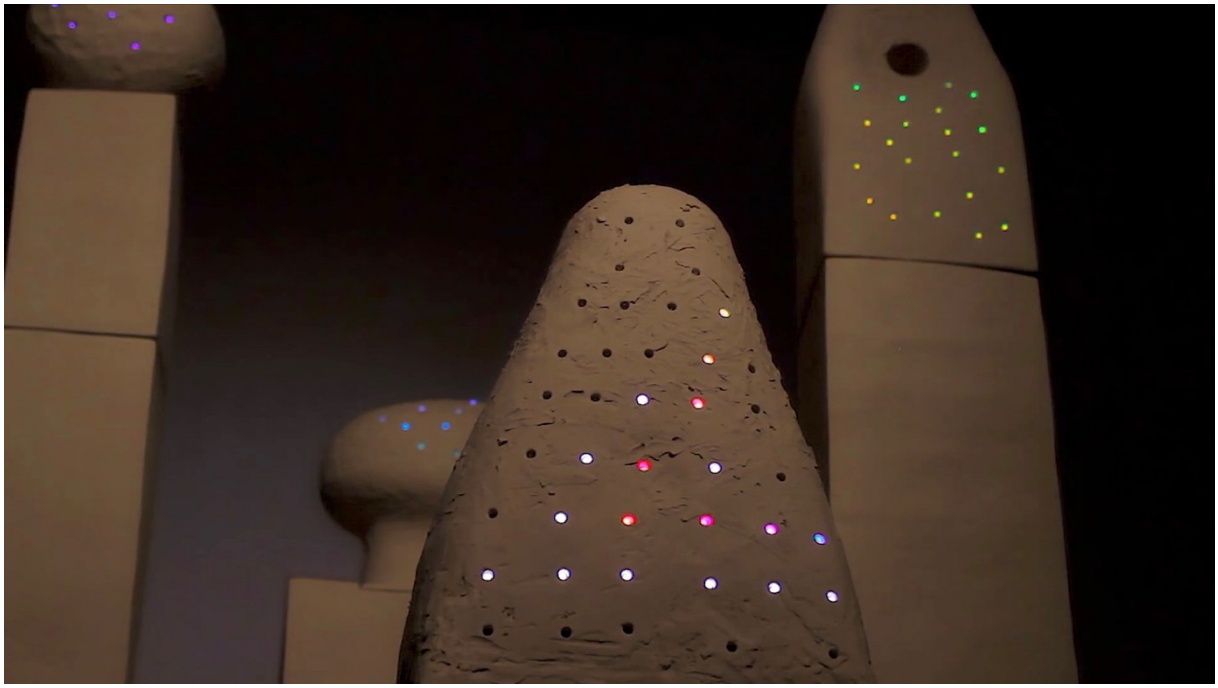
The experience of *North-North* finally triggered the collapse of meaning that they had withstood for so long. But the project also marked the beginning of a new intense phase of collaboration between Diana and Erik. When they were finally able to move past the goal of achieving autonomy through creative output, creativity erupted once again.

The new sequence of works gathered momentum from Diana's emerging career. During 2017, they twice exhibited new pieces—opportunities that arose from her master's project. The piece *Skins* was created for the group show *Performing Craft* at Gustavsberg Konsthall.

Although Diana alone was invited, the work developed as a co-created piece, repeatedly testing the strength of their commitment to working together.

**Figure 8**

*Skins, 2017.*



*Note.* The pieces in motion, LED lights on their surface, illustrate recorded voices talking about art.

The piece explored the feedback loop between maker, work, and audience. It took shape as large ceramic statues, animated by light and sound with a micro-controller, using music notation to animate a grid of programmable LED lights (Figure 8). Both concept and form were created jointly, but Erik's involvement did not fit the exhibition's developing curatorial framework. During the production of the piece, it remained an open secret.

The exhibition narrowed around identity-based norm-critique, but Diana's piece embodied two identities. Her insistence to work with Erik implicitly became a critique of the local normativity within the exhibition context. The work solved the paradox by handing over performative agency to the statues themselves. The shifting light patterns on their surfaces translated people's recorded reactions to Diana's art into colour and movement, displaying the effects of judgment as marks on their surface (Figure 9).

Sara Ahmed (2012) has noted that institutional practices of inclusion often reproduce exclusion by framing participation through pre-existing norms. Erik's name was omitted from the exhibition materials, but in the follow-up show later in the Spring at Österängen Konsthall, his role in the work was restored, marking his official exhibition debut as an artist.

**Figure 9**

*Skins, 2017.*



Later in the year, Diana and Erik were offered a solo exhibition at Galleri LarsPalm in Sandviken. They used the opportunity to leave translation, exchange, and heritage behind, and created a work that spoke of the life and the collaborative practice they had built together.

They used the forest landscape around their home in southern Stockholm as material. It was an environment that offered peace and simplicity, where they could swim, grill, and pick

mushrooms and blueberries. The repeating forms and interlinked sounds of the forest were borrowed to create an interactive experience based on nature's living networks.

During the months of production, *Trying to Connect* remained very loosely defined as 'about the forest'. Any attempt to formulate it, caused collaboration to stall. Instead, each artist deliberately left space for the other within their own work. As incremental progress was shared, the other's work grew into those openings in a co-evolutionary feedback loop. Negative space and mutual trust, rather than coordination, produced a work that was integrated without having been designed as a single system—mimicking the living networks it described.

Diana's sculptures resembled scaled-up pieces of lichen, balanced on ceramic podiums. Within the looping mesh of clay pipes, electronic sensors were concealed, their cables running down through the podiums to a central computer, where the collected data fed a probabilistic music algorithm. The podiums acted as resonance chambers for small speakers, giving each sculpture its own voice while contributing to the overall composition.

The musical logic unfolded only through collective participation, from a resting state of a quiet forestscape into music with harmony, melody, and rhythm. Progression required several people to interact simultaneously with different sculptures, turning the gallery into a telematic instrument. Order emerged tentatively through listening-based coordination among participants. The result was an ethics of performance that mirrored the work's own condition—nature as material, co-evolution as method.

Félix Guattari (1989) has described ecology as a paradigm of relation, spanning environmental, social, and mental dimensions, which operates through the principle of *heterogenesis*—continual production of difference through relational processes. For Guattari, ecology is a general condition of life: every system exists through the complex interdependencies that either sustain or destroy it.

In *Trying to Connect*, ecology manifested simultaneously as subject and form. The forest provided both the material and the metaphor for relation, while the work's structure and method enacted its logic of interdependence and feedback. The turn was inevitable: after the exhaustion of personal, economic, and institutional superstructures, only the substrate itself remained, the material continuity that supported everything else and was suffering for it. Nature mirrored both the collapse of their efforts and their persistence within collapse.

*Trying to Connect* (Figure 10) was created while facing the consequences of the failure to sustain independent artistic careers. They were both preparing to step into new

professions—as teacher and programmer, respectively—fully aware that this shift would severely constrain future projects.

**Figure 10**

*Trying to Connect, performance.*



But while they traded the anxious precarity of freelance autonomy for the dull repetition of employment, they were determined to use the new stability to rebuild more sustainable conditions for their creative work.

*Trying to Connect* was an aesthetic articulation of the commitment to interdependence as form, before undertaking the transition that could turn it into lived reality. When their shared practice eventually resurfaced, it appeared in a rural field just one town over from the gallery that hosted *Trying to Connect*. But the road back would take years to traverse.

## An Open Field

> Cracks may be commonly observed in nature—in breaking ice, sun-baked mud, stressed rock, dead wood, and the bark of ancient trees. But of course they are common in artefacts too, whether made of clay, wood, glass, or concrete. Unless scratch marks are the ultimate cause of fracture, cracks show no respect for the

> traces that may have been drawn over a surface. Thus cracks interrupt traces rather as, in the landscape, a path of travel may be interrupted by a precipitous gorge in an otherwise level plateau. To get across, you have to construct a bridge, whereupon the trace becomes a thread. (Ingold, 2007, p. 45)

The bedroom window overlooks a field of grass with a slowly collapsing barn. Once or twice per year, depending on the weather, the tenant farmer cuts the grass for silage. Apart from that, the field manages itself.

During spring flood, cranes stilt through the mud. In autumn, a moose with calves lumbers across the field toward the lake. The neighbour says he saw a wolf once. A pair of binoculars sit by the window.

At the far end of the field is a swampy grove of aspen and birches—junipers where the ground is dry. Waders, seabirds, and raptors make the grove their home. In the early morning, songbirds fill it with their calls.

The field is bisected by an embankment where people walk their dogs. In the past, narrow-gauge rail ran there, taking timber and iron from the interior down to the coast. When the wind is right, a faint ring of church bells or the whining brakes of a freight train indicate the way into town. Beyond the lake, the landscape rises to the west, a row of windmills spinning slowly on the ridge.

It is both material and workshop. Diana sculpts with clay she digs from the drainage ditches, combining it with grass, leaves, and branches. Erik arranges the sounds of the field into a music about the negotiation between abandonment and return, the slow friction of natural and constructed elements wearing each other down.

The landscape is the shared structure their collaboration previously lacked. It is the place where they ‘eat, sleep, and raise their children’, as Sennett wrote about the workshops of the past. Repetition arises through the cycle of seasons; endurance, through the way the rusting remains of the past become new nesting places.

Its geography, ecology, history, and its role for the community are material for the stories they write, a habitable epistemology they work by observing and documenting. Their attention aerates the soil, surfacing knowledge like stones after the plough. Life, making, and inquiry, *becoming research* together with the land.

For a few weeks at the end of spring, dandelions turn the field bright yellow—revealing the rhizome spreading underneath. When the flowers turn to puff balls and seeds drift over to the garden, the field escapes its enclosure—the porous borders sometimes delineated by a ditch or a line of trees, other times only visible on the land survey map.

The distinction between field and not-field continues to blur as it stretches outward without abandoning its ground—what Coessens, Crispin, and Douglas (2009), following Deleuze and Guattari, call *deterritorialization*—movement through and beyond one’s boundaries.

In *The Artistic Turn*, they describe artistic research as a mode of thought that unfolds in an ongoing dislocation of practice from its habitual centre. To create is already to move through thresholds—between making and reflection, between the personal and the collective, between one medium and another. The artist's territory is never fixed but a 'malleable site of passage', (Coessens et al., p. 92, quoting Parr, 2005) continually redrawn by the act of creation itself.

Knowledge arises not from establishing new borders but from crossing existing ones, allowing unfamiliar forces to enter and transform the work. Artistic research therefore proceeds by reconfiguring the relation between territory and movement. It borrows the tools of other disciplines yet refuses to be confined by their logics; it occupies their spaces temporarily, then departs, leaving altered ground behind.

In this sense, it is more rhythm than method—alternating phases of enclosure and escape, of concentration and dispersal. The field is one such rhythm made visible: a living system that knows by shifting its own boundaries.

Diana Butucariu and Erik Lindeborg turned to research as another way to achieve sustainable practice. Like many other artists of their generation, their creativity was absorbed into its rising tide. In the Spring of 2018, while Erik studied programming and Diana taught her first semester as a teacher, she applied to Konstfack to enrol in their one-year postgraduate Research Lab.

In anticipation of the course, they rehearsed what research might mean by transforming a rented apartment in Bucharest into their own laboratory. Animation artist Kaoru Furuko joined them for a performative investigation of the audiovisual properties of glass, staged as a science experiment.

Based on the mythical property of cold glass to flow imperceptibly over long periods of time, Furuko and Lindeborg functioned as lab technicians, gathering experimental data through sound and stop-motion animation, while Butucariu acted researcher, preparing their experiments for presentation at the gallery nearby (Figure 11).

For Diana, the material samples represented heritage. The pieces of glass they worked with had originally been salvaged from the defunct communist-era glass factory where her father began his career as a glass artist (Figure 12).

By tasking two novices with researching a substance so intimately tied to mastery, the project proposed an ethics of materiality based not on control or even representation, but on attunement. The true material of *Fluid State* was not glass, but attention itself—what glass teaches us when we stop trying to master it: that stability is provisional, that transparency hides stress, that fragility is continuous with strength.

**Figure 11**

*Fluid State, making process.*



**Figure 12**

*Fluid State, making process.*



*Fluid State* proved that the two artists could still create while working in other jobs, but it also revealed the limitations of their new situation. Erik could only take a few days off before returning to Stockholm, missing the vernissage. As a teacher, Diana had the summer off, but she was facing a year of double full-time work—teaching and research.

The fieldwork for her upcoming project had to be finished before the semester started. *Fluid State* was created just days after returning from the field trip to Malmberget in Northern Sweden. The projects leached into each other in unpredictable ways.

The Research Lab project would mark her debut as a glass artist—depicting the evacuation and collapse of an Arctic mining town through a series of stained-glass installations (Figures 13 and 14). *Fluid State* investigated the glass material. The subject of her research was post-industrial identity-making. In *Fluid State*, the artist processed industrial fragments tied to her own identity.

Diana returned from the fault-zone in Malmberget with recorded stories, photos, video, and artefacts she would use to mount her stained-glasses in. But soon after the course began, the ground started to give way under her own feet. The town's fracturing due to the excavation of its foundation came to reflect both an increasingly strained collaboration with Erik, and the erosion of institutional structures meant to support her work.

**Figure 13**

*Inside the Circle, Behind the Fence, 'Inside'.*



Two stained glass pieces are arranged in a drawer and in a wood shelf, discovered among the discarded remains after the houses were relocated.

As the course progressed, the museum chosen to host the final presentations began to exert curatorial pressure, requesting—then demanding—that projects engage with its collection of craft objects from around the world.

**Figure 14**

*Inside the Circle, Behind the Fence, 'Green house' and 'Herbarium'.*



*Inside the Circle, Behind the Fence* had been accepted without comment, and the fieldwork had been completed in accordance with the proposal's time-plan. Success depended on executing the project as described.

Under increasing pressure from the course leadership to adapt the project to the museum collection, Diana turned to Erik. Together they refocused the project on the obvious parallels between the museum and her investigation of Malmberget—the process of resource extraction from the country's periphery and their accumulation in the centre.

This political turn was of course not what the museum was hoping for. Diana was pressured to change course. Alone, she likely would have folded and withdrawn from the project entirely. But Erik was convinced of the strength of their position, and they persisted.

In the lead-up to the exhibition, an attempt was made to block Diana's work, on the grounds that the salvaged artefacts might pose a risk of infestation to the museum's collection. After treating the works with heat and chemicals, the museum approved them for display at the last moment.

The exhibition catalogue was explicit about the parallels Diana had been forced to draw:

> [T]he memory of the machinery that sponsored this pursuit, is conspicuously absent from Hallwylska. The imprint of the workers and their families, whose lives and communities were dominated by the family business, is barely felt. I placed my stained-glass works throughout the house as reminders of that side of the extractive,

> centripetal process, which takes in resources and hard work from the periphery, and extrudes wealth and culture in the centre. (Butucariu et al., 2019, p. 44)

Diana was devastated. She had been forced to make a very difficult decision that altered her vision and undermined her academic ambition. Her understated and poetic reflection on post-collapse identity-making had been turned into polemic against an artworld she was trying to be part of.

Erik was also devastated. Again, he had been called on to use his instinct to rescue a threatened project, and done so forcefully, layering the work with political energy. It wasn't Diana's original vision, but it was still coherent. But again, he could take no credit for his work.

Both artists had lost something. Diana alone had to defend work that was not only hers. Erik had to relinquish authorship of a piece infused with his sensibility and had to stand back while Diana was assailed for his words. But they had saved the piece, and Diana could finish the course. They had kept the implicit promise to the people of Malmberget, who entrusted Diana with their stories. And they had trusted their collaboration to absorb the mounting external pressure and persevere.

Independent of the course, the students organized an exhibition in a repurposed industrial building in the small community whose resources had funded the museum's construction. In that local art space, the politics of Diana's works were neither foregrounded nor misunderstood but recognized for what they were.

Like Sandviken—where *Trying to Connect* was created—Ljusne was situated one town over from where they would eventually relocate. Unknowingly, the dispute had educated them about the politics and history of their future home region. The local government bought one of the glass works for their collections, a symbolic repatriation of meaning.

Later in the year, the piece was part of a large show with local artists in Focushuset—Malmberget's only high-rise—weeks before its demolition. Erik's soundtrack—made with Diana's recorded interviews—restored the piece's true authorial condition. From the tenth floor, the installation overlooked a city condemned by its proximity to extractable value, echoing their own condition.

Left alone, *Inside the Circle* might have developed in a more explicitly ecological direction, instead of the class-centred perspective forced by the focus on the Stockholm palace and its riches. But the ecological consequences of extraction were still part of the investigation.

In the last paragraph of her exhibition text, Diana wrote:

> In Malmberget I feel the presence of an entity. The mine makes me think about the planet and feel a closer connection to nature. By exploiting natural resources, we make places uninhabitable for ourselves. (Butucariu et al., 2019, p. 46)

The channel to nature they had opened during *Trying to Connect* continued to transmit, but it was so weak that it could be mistaken for noise. Nature's distress haunted the work from below, giving it an atmosphere of instability and exhaustion.

The project's premise—that material and social collapse were expressions of the same extractive logic—would become central in Diana's PhD proposal. In the intervening period, she made installations in nature, around Malmberget and in the forests around the apartment, and continued to sculpt its forms in clay.

Erik, meanwhile, was stuck developing his programming career and improving his new craft of generative music programming. Their collaboration went silent once again but continued to slowly rearrange their lives. Programming was chosen in part for the prospect of working remotely. As his new career matured, they started planning their exit from a city where they had never managed to belong.

The couple spent weekends driving up and down the Swedish countryside, imagining life in a dozen houses—in towns, villages, and forest clearings. When the pandemic hit, their ambitions suddenly aligned with a rapidly adapting society. Their efforts intensified until, in the Winter of 2022, they found their new home on a farm outside a small de-industrialized town.

In the meantime, Diana's PhD project, *Sustainability in Ceramic Art*, had been proposed and accepted, and the parallel processes influenced each other. Her project timeline specified that she would learn what sustainability meant by visiting the workshops of rural practitioners engaged in sustainable making. But then they moved to the countryside, and became those people. It would take years of writing—including this text—to discover the real meaning of sustainability already present in their work, dimensions that the proposal's focus on efficiency and policy only served to obscure.

They were aware of the irony as they wrote the proposal, but it could not be avoided. Even so, the text correctly pointed out directions that the research would explore: local sourcing as epistemology; digging as knowing; modularity as ethics; small, repeatable work as sustainable form; and, crucially, the tension between making and living, the continuous negotiation between artistic desire and material survival.

The proposal invoked Guattari's triadic ecology in writing, without realizing that their work had embodied it years earlier. The proposal thus performed a temporal retroaction in the Lacanian sense: becoming authentic only afterward, but sending that authenticity backward through time, to consecrate the moment of its own fabrication.

What they now called *sustainability* was in fact the same logic that had guided their work all along—the craft of maintaining relation under pressure, of finding form within exhaustion. Its formulation as a research subject itself enacted, in language, the struggle it sought to name, translating lived precarity and care into academic discourse.

As the light changed, mist rolled in, or the rain picked up, the field looked different. When that happened, Erik would go upstairs, open the window, and take a photo. The same framing, over and over, but never the same image. Viewing the pictures side by side revealed the field as a stage—enacting scenes in a cyclical play.

The modest, post-industrial biotope quietly embodied an ethic of entanglement that they had been pursuing, a form of life where creative, ecological, economic, and social commitments could carefully rearrange its inhabited space. Sustainability: it was right there, outside the window.

Friends and family came and went. Some stayed for a day or two, unpacking boxes or tearing down old wallpaper; others stayed longer to help repaint. Neighbours took an interest—everyone seemed to know about the musician and ceramicist. Then their first child was born.

The tempo shifted, leaving more time for interaction: conversations in the street, invitations for coffee, offers to help, requests for favours. Erik was asked to play at the Christmas market. Diana was invited to talk about her ceramics at the library. In the Spring of 2024, the couple was included in a group exhibition at the converted forge. The subject of their work became the land around their house.

The ironworks and manor at Wij in Ockelbo are emblematic of a regional history shaped by mining and forestry, along waterways running from the highlands to the coast. One river north of Ockelbo, Ljusnan, reaches the sea by the old power station where Diana once exhibited her glassworks. In their new piece *Raw Materials*, they engaged once again with the legacy of the region's industry—but this time as members of the community.

Diana built scaffolds of aspen saplings that the neighbour had weeded out, and covered them in clay from the ditch. Erik made music from recordings of tool work: sledgehammers, saws, brushes sweeping the floor—layering them with birdsong from the field. At the vernissage, he performed by live coding the piece, the forge echoing once again with the sounds of making.

When they first met, Erik was 27 and Diana 21. Erik had finished his studies, released albums, toured widely, and won awards. Diana was still completing her bachelor's—just beginning her career. Moving to Sweden deepened the imbalance—she had no community and didn't speak the language.

Their early collaborations, *Salonul Magic*, attempted to create balance within the asymmetry. They grounded the work in Diana's native culture. Erik shared his platform, inviting her onto his stage. Eventually, he set aside his instrument and the identity tied to it, and approached Diana's practice through video and performance art. He debased himself in front of his music audience, wielding household objects as instruments.

They overshot. As Diana gained experience and visibility due to her master's project and an increasingly accomplished ceramics practice, Erik found himself without either institutional belonging or a scene. The only platform he had left was the one they built together.

For years, Diana took responsibility for Erik's career when she should have focused on her own. Meanwhile, he was doing creative work without the recognition needed to re-emerge, because of organizational structures that would not accommodate their collaboration. During a period of mounting pressure, they kept trying to connect. Every brief moment of real work continued to deepen the collaboration.

In 2023, Erik was accepted to research musical approaches to crafting at Konstfack, validating a decade of transdisciplinary work. The project, *Sounding Craft*, created a theoretical foundation for the method they developed intuitively together over the years.

The exhibition at the forge the following Spring materialized their respective research trajectories as new co-created work, their first in five years. More importantly, it showed their research as a shared undertaking (Figure 15).

**Figure 15**

*Erik Lindeborg performing at the opening of Raw Materials next to Diana Butucariu's works.*



The reason the field in Ockelbo resonates in Diana and Erik's work is not its untouched beauty. It is managed nature, marked by centuries of use—worked, shaped, depleted, restored. It carries histories of extraction, subsistence, maintenance, abandonment, and return. They do not inhabit an ideal but move in correspondence with a place inscribed with layers of time.

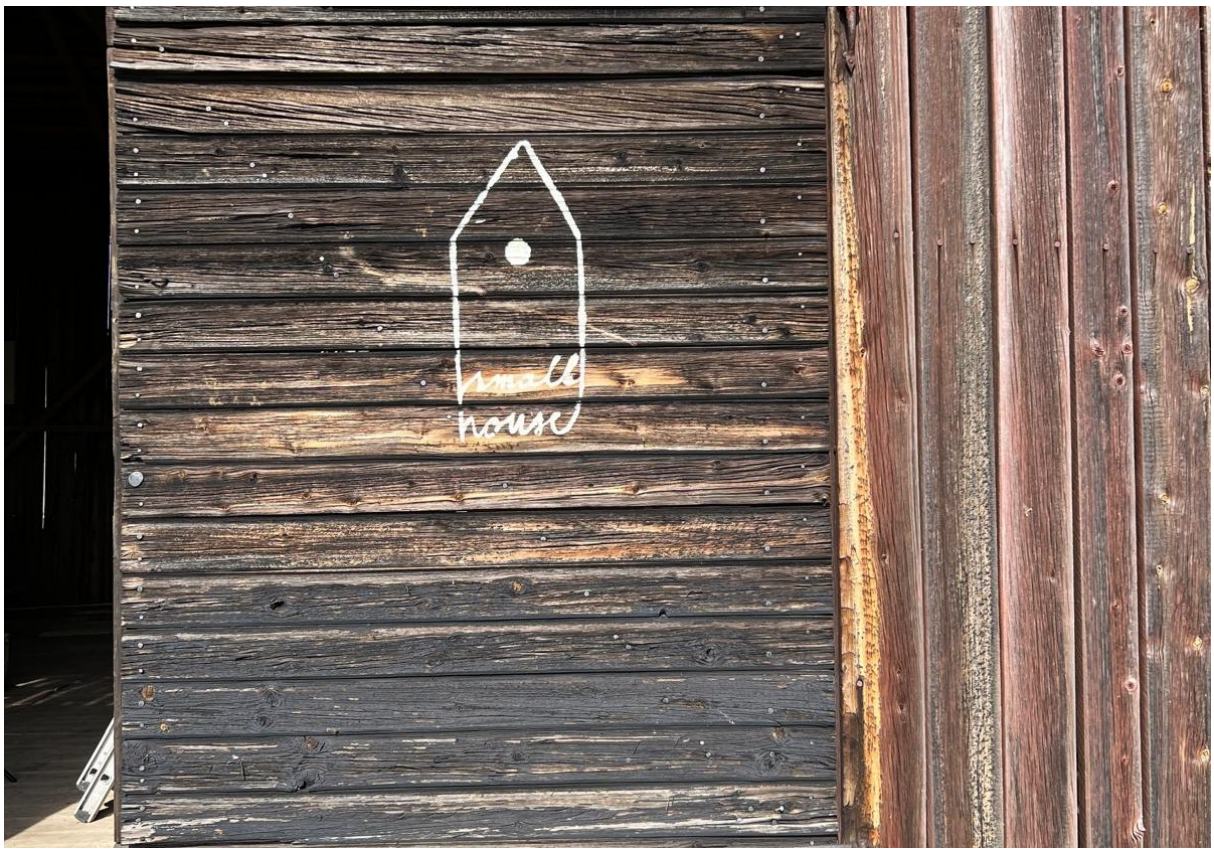
**Figure 16**

*The barn and the field.*



**Figure 17**

*The Small House logo on the barn door.*



They use what's available, respond to what's left behind. The work isn't imposed on the landscape—it grows from it. They feel the land in their bodies: in exhaustion, overuse, the pressure to produce. The field resonates because it reflects their condition.

In April 2025, Mircea Modreanu and George Buca travelled through Europe with their pop-up exhibition concept, *Etaj on Wheels*. One of their stops was in Ockelbo—to set up the exhibition in the barn in the field (Figure 16). Over a couple of intense days—reminiscent of other work long ago—the worn building was mended, cleared out, and turned into a gallery.

The grill was carted into the field and invitation signs were put up on the street. Diana painted the *Small House* logo on the door, as she had when the studio was new (Figure 17). As evening fell, neighbours made their way across the field, with their dogs, children, walkers. Romanian *mici* sizzled on the grill while Erik played music; the barn was filled with the work of Romanian artists.

Diana had once hosted an audience she did not know, just after moving to Sweden. Now they were together as newcomers, opening their door to people who had been there for generations. The evening's conviviality was not a gesture—neither critique nor performance—but simply a way of being together without explanation. That night, the words were not said. It was only in writing this text that I recognized my face in the reflection of the work.

A thread long assumed severed was found, leading into a barn in a field. The line had not been broken but hidden in the grass. Ten years after being evicted, they were finally able to return to the place where collaboration had first become possible: *Salonul Magic*.

In the end, sustainability was not the subject but the form, allowing practice to emerge from life. They did what young people mustn't—they adopted each other's methods. Diana performs and Erik crafts. *I was a sign, a room, and a house. Now I am an open field. Absorbing, eroding, holding what remains.*

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