Soil Laboratory: Crafting Experiments in an Exhibition Setting

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will reflect on the role of craft and design in environmental discourse. In order to do this, I will discuss the collective craft and design project *Soil Laboratory* as a case study highlighting its methodological decisions. I will first introduce the exhibition *Soil Matters*,[1] which was the context for my case study. Then, I will illustrate through the case study how craft and design exhibitions can facilitate a deeper examination of societal or environmental phenomena.

These current times of ecological urgency challenge us to disrupt the dominant expectations of design to be harnessed for economic progress, industry and capitalism (Fletcher et al., 2019, pp. 9–10). As exemplified by this anthology, practitioners in the craft field are increasingly concerned with issues related to past, present and future of the (natural) environment. Design researcher Ramia Mazé (2013, p. 89) argues that representation, such as 'naming' and 'making visible', is a practice of politics. When craft and design make visible how and by whom natural resources are accessed, or address the inequality of human and non-human entities, politics of sustainability are actualized (Mazé, 2013, p. 85).

Curator and design researcher Christina Zetterlund (2013, pp. 49–50) explains that exhibitions are platforms for contextualising, reflecting upon and discussing craft

[1] The Soil Matters exhibition was on display at the Design Museum Helsinki, Finland from September 4th 2020 to January 10th 2021. https://www.designmuseum.fi/en/soil-matters/ (accessed March 18th 2022).

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and design and therefore have the power to affect how the field is understood. She notes that museum exhibitions have played an essential role in communicating craft and design history by presenting objects from collections. However, she encourages expansion of the notion of craft and design beyond visual exhibition objects "that decorate capitalism," allowing critical examination of contradictions of everyday life (Zetterlund, 2013, p. 50). Design researchers Ilpo Koskinen, Thomas Binder and Johan Redström (2008, p. 53), note that, in a sense, exhibitions can be compared to research papers as both are forms of knowledge dissemination. They argue that while both forms of communication may build on theoretical frameworks, exhibitions allow reflection by providing experiences rather than theoretical thinking. Furthermore, through exhibitions, knowledge sharing can be expanded beyond the academic community, through practices such as museum pedagogy in the form of organized lectures and workshops for the general public.

Museums are not neutral but have social and political agendas (Putnam, 2001, p. 31). Since the late twentieth century, museums have actively invited practitioners of the creative field as curators to develop conventional presentation and interpretation through fresh and critical initiatives (Putnam, 2001, p. 31). Following this tendency, the heads of the Design Museum Helsinki launched a programme in 2017 by which they seek new content through competing exhibition proposals. These recent winning proposals enhance the new Design Museum strategy, which emphasises the museum as a place for creating new knowledge and as a platform for societal change.[2]

In 2020, the exhibition proposal *Soil Matters* was selected to represent the theme 'materiality'. The proposal combined art, craft, design, and science to discuss humans' and soil's intertwined relations. The exhibition was curated by two craft practitioners, Maarit Mäkelä and me, Riikka Latva-Somppi, both of us situating our work also in research and academic education. I have a ceramics and glass art background. Similarly, Maarit Mäkelä has a long working history in the craft field as a ceramic artist. The exhibition's curation builds on the feminist understanding of situated knowledge, as explained by biologist and philosopher Donna Haraway (1991, pp. 188–189). She suggests that by acknowledging our situatedness and drawing from it—not splitting the subject and the object—we may become "answerable for what we learn" (Haraway, 1991, p. 190). Thus, the exhibition shared knowledge that springs from the craft and design practice and was communicated aesthetically through craft and design. Simultaneously, the exhibition was a platform where collaborations were born and knowledge merged, and was created and reiterated in the hope of cultivating responsibility and care towards soil.

[2] These aspects of the new museum strategy were discussed in the first meeting with the museum personnel after *Soil Matters* was selected as the winner of the Design Club Call in 2020.

2 Shared Matter

> Knowledge is key to interpreting and understanding the causal relations that contribute to the ecological status of the earth. Individual value sets emphasise emotions and the importance of cultivating a personal relationship with the environment. Soil can be seen as fertile farming land or profitable plot land, as polluted industrial soil that requires expensive recuperation measures, or as a valuable ecosystem. As well as profit-based approaches, each of us can explore our role as just one of the many members of the soil community. Thinking about our own relationship with soil helps us to assume more responsibility for our actions.

An excerpt from the thematic texts that we, the curators, wrote to accompany the exhibition works.

Technoscience scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2019, p. 395) emphasises affective soil relations and proposes establishing and sharing art and science practices that strengthen intimate human-soil matter entanglements and the "(im)possibilities of care". She argues that interdisciplinary cultural engagements can be understood as aesthetic storytelling that does more than illustrate or communicate science. "They co-create stories" and "renew soil imaginaries" in a way that is affective, practical and ethico-political (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2019, p. 395).

As an area of design, craft is rooted in making products for daily use. This links craft and design practices to the consumption of the earth's resources, employing minerals, metals, water, and energy as raw materials. Thus, craft practices are tightly interwoven with the materiality of human cultures of the past and present, including their impact on the environment. When a craft practitioner's disciplinary approach to materiality and object making is applied to the contemporary environmental discourse, it inevitably becomes entangled with its own becoming (see also Latva-Somppi et al., 2020). Haraway (2016, p. 4) encourages staying with the heavy, ongoing present environmental challenges, even though this can be disturbing and uncomfortable for any of us humans. Hence, dwelling on the troubles of the design and craft processes can provide a profound means to reflect on environmental and cultural materiality from the perspective of craft practitioners and also that of consumers.

Eco-feminist thinking builds on environmental ethics that emphasises relationality and interdependence (Cuomo, 2005, pp. 203–204). Moreover, it supports the idea that individual experience, intention, and will have ethical and political significance. Such feministic thinking echoes the American philosopher and conservationist Aldo Leopold's (1949/2020, p. 192) thought that all ethics build on the idea of the individual as an interdependent member of a community. His 'land ethic' extended the concept of a community to include the land: soils, waters, plants and animals. A land ethic does not prevent the utilisation of natural resources, but it changes humans' ethos from that of an exploiter to one of a caring member of the community (Leopold, 1949/2020, p. 192). Furthermore, Leopold (1949/2020, p. 202) argued that we can only be ethical "in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in".

2.1 Site-Specific Material Inquiries

The *Soil Matters* exhibition brought together projects through which the following questions were asked: How are the craft and design industry and the consumption of everyday objects involved in the reformation and contamination of soil, and what is our relationship with soil? Furthermore, the exhibition examined ideas of soil as dynamic matter, overconsumption and solid waste, material innovation, and soils as living environments of soil communities.

The potency of craft and design can be diverted from highlighting form and visuality to, for instance, site-specific meaning-making (Zetterlund, 2013, p. 56). The nine projects selected for the *Soil Matters* exhibition were geographically situated in the Nordic countries of Finland, Denmark and Iceland; in Venice, Italy; and in Inner Mongolia, China. The site-specific inquiries proved that while the issues around soil are locally bound, they share a common global narrative. Local geologies are irreversibly affected at sites of excavation, refining, transportation, production, consumption, construction and, finally, abandonment—where the discarded products or their traces end as waste.

The curation of the exhibition sprang from experience of practitioners and researchers in the field of ceramics and glass. Ceramic and glass practitioners possess knowledge of natural materials and materialities; for instance, an aesthetic sensibility developed over time through active engagement with materials combined with scientific material knowledge, such as material chemistry (Latva-Somppi & Mäkelä, 2020). Ceramics is essentially fired earth. The local geology determines the colours and consistency of the ceramic objects that are made from the site-specific clay materials. For example, the iron-rich clay of Finland fires to reddish-brown colours. Iron also lowers the temperature that is needed to turn the earth into ceramics. Similarly, the primary raw materials used in glass-making originate from the earth; the main ingredient is silica sand, combined with soda ash and calcium carbonate initially retrieved from plant ashes. Likewise, iron affects the colour of glass by giving it a greenish tint. By adding another earth metal, manganese, the green colour can be diminished. Ceramists and glassmakers are thus involved in the soil-matter in many ways. They engage with it bodily while making and caring for it as their material medium, but also by extracting and consuming it as raw material.

Next, I will explain how knowledge gained through craft practice was mediated in the exhibition *Soil Matters*. First, I will introduce the different thematics of the exhibition by briefly describing the related projects. Then, I will reflect on the methodology of the project *Soil Laboratory* by reviewing the basic ideas and practices of laboratory and fieldwork and how they merged with the gallery space during the exhibition. After that, I will define the educational dimensions of the *Soil Laboratory* project as a whole. Finally, I argue that craft has the potential power[3] to affect human-soil relations by engaging with and making visible complex environmental matters.

[3] According to Hannah Arendt (1998/1958, pp. 199–207), power always rises from acting together for a common purpose. It is always "potential power" that establishes relations and creates new realities.

2.2 *In Dialogue with Local Soil*

Although many of the nine exhibition projects covered overlapping themes, they can be roughly divided into three categories: natural soils, anthropogenic geology, and collective efforts to care for soils. To allow a deeper reflection on the collective practices of care, I will briefly present the six works in the first two categories and then look at the three projects that form the third category in more detail.

The first category included projects that contemplated human-soil relations in an environment assumed free of human impact, or even protected from humans. One such is Maarit Mäkelä's work *Earth-Dialogue* (2015), in which she deliberates the idea of creative materiality by using undisturbed soils from New Zealand (Fig. 1) (see also Mäkelä, 2019). Her work utilises soil's materiality in artistic production in a respectful and almost spiritual way. Similarly, Erna Skúladóttir's work *Horizons (Dirt is Matter out of Place)*[4] (2020) was created from natural soils. The artist used soil from a fragile ecosystem, the Krýsuvík geysers in Iceland, which are protected by law. When she collected the material for her artwork from a nearby ditch, the soil had become ordinary dirt. Through the work, she reflected on the status of soil and its classification and regulation that is dependent on economic, environmental, and cultural values.

The second category contrasted 'untouched' nature with environments that human activity has impacted on heavily. This category introduced soil as a dynamic matter that constantly changes due to pollution and solid waste production. The project *Rare Earthenware* (2014) by Unknown Fields Division, directed by Liam Young and Kate Davies, traced three objects of technology—a cell phone, a laptop and a smart car battery—to the origins of their materials in Inner Mongolia. It juxtaposed the high-end industrial products with three handcrafted vases made from the polluted soil gathered from a tailings lake of the mining industry. The vases represent Tongping or 'sleeve' vases dating from the Ming Dynasty, which are objects of high value and international trade. The artefacts embody global supply networks that displace matter across the planet (see also Unknown Fields, 2016).

Also, the project *Traces from the Anthropocene: Working with Soil* (2019) addressed the consequences of human action in a particular geological environment. This was the seed project for the exhibition and was similarly led by Maarit Mäkelä and me. Here, a group of ceramic artists and researchers studied the Venice Lagoon's soil and sediments with scientific and artistic methods to understand how they have changed due to anthropogenic impact (see also Latva-Somppi et al., 2020). In another work, Swedish designer and artist Annelie Grimwade Olofsson addressed overconsumption and questioned material innovation in the changing geology in *WASTE-LAND* (2019–). Her ceramic sculptures result from meticulous study and material experimentation with solid, toxic by-products of waste incineration (Fig. 2). Finally,

[4] The phrase "dirt is matter out of place" was famously applied to social and cultural systems by social anthropologist Mary Douglas, but its origins may lie in discussing urban waste and sewage (Campkin, 2013).

Fig. 1 Earth-Dialogue consisted of the finished artefact and a minimalist array of soil materials from New Zealand (Photo: Design Museum Helsinki, Paavo Lehtonen)

through my work *Artificial Islands* (2019–2020) I asked whether we can distinguish between a naturally created landscape and an artificial construct generated by consumer society's needs. The work was composed from photographs and found materials from a Venetian island that was built from domestic waste, construction rubble, and the waste from the Muranese glass industry, following a centuries-old local tradition of island-making.

2.3 Making and Unmaking with Care

The projects in the third category inquired into our relationship with soil and explored ways of caring for it together. The project *Soil Care: Symphony rehearsal* (2019–2020) by Taiwanese designer Tzuyu Chen relied on collaborative craft practice. She invited exhibition visitors to think about their soil relationship by presenting recordings from interviews with soil professionals: an archaeologist, a construction engineer, and a biodynamic farmer. The interviewees were asked about their relationship with soil while they crafted objects of clay made from the soil of their working locations. Soil material samples and ceramic tests from the specific sites where the interviewees worked were displayed side by side with the recordings in a video format.

Fig. 2 *WASTELAND* used the by-products from BOFA (Bornholms Affaldsbehandling), the municipal waste management company of the island of Bornholm in Denmark (Photo: Design Museum Helsinki, Paavo Lehtonen)

Un/Making Soil Communities (2018–) by the Swedish designer duo Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl examined how could we engage in the consequences of the design industry, and who should be included and how (see also Lindström & Ståhl, 2020) (Fig. 3). The designers conducted participatory design workshops in a district in the south of Sweden that is generally called "The Kingdom of Crystal". The workshops were designed to involve the local residents in speculating about how to act in the glass industry's aftermath. Using participatory design methods, they co-imagined how to care for the polluted soil, and whether it could include working with plants that can remediate soil. Furthermore, they discussed the risks and responsibilities that are present when we work with other species. The workshop participants were given some seeds of plants that are known to extract heavy metals from the soil. In this way, the designers handed over the initiative to continue to care for the environment together with plants after the workshop had ended.

During the exhibition, the *Un/making Soil Communities* project was extended to the local site of the former glass industry, the Nuutajärvi Glass Village in Urjala, Finland. The invitation, which was initially crafted for the local residents of the Kingdom of Crystal in Sweden, was now extended, in a relay manner, to the Finnish craft practitioners working in the context of the exhibition (see also Latva-Somppi et al., 2021). In addition, participatory design workshops were reconstructed and took the form of sharing the research processes publicly in the exhibition setting and online.

Fig. 3 The project display presented iconic objects of Finnish glass design as examples of using metals in the manufacture of glass. The setting also included soil polluted by the glass industry and an ongoing phytoremediation experiment (Photo: Design Museum Helsinki, Paavo Lehtonen)

The two above mentioned projects explored our relationship with soil and ways of caring for soil by inviting local residents and soil professionals to engage in the processes. Moreover, both projects are connected to the third project of this category which is also the case under study: the *Soil Laboratory*. This project explicitly aimed to present the collective and collaborative efforts aimed at caring for soil. Next, I will explain the key features of this evolving project, which was physically placed in the heart of the gallery space during the exhibition.

3 Open-Ended Experimentation

Museums have established practices that engage artists in interventions within the museum space, to bring in fresh ideas and to interact with the museum collections in a new way (Putnam, 2001, p. 31). In the *Soil Matters* exhibition, the idea was to present the dynamics of working and thinking together in the exhibition context. The *Soil Laboratory* was conceived to make the artistic research work visible to the general public and to enable taking forward projects that stem from the works on display by the team of ceramic artists and researchers: namely Maarit Mäkelä, Catharina Kajander, Tzuyu Chen and me.[5] Moreover, the *Soil Laboratory* was designed to allow the public to engage in discussions around the exhibition's topics. Visitors to the exhibition were encouraged to follow the progress of the work and approach the artist-researchers with questions. The project was purposefully named a laboratory, not, for example, a studio, to emphasise the element of research, experimentation, and open-endedness. Mäkelä and I, the exhibition's curators, designed the concept and the activities. We also participated with the rest of the research team in the projects that were carried out.

Three interlocking projects evolved during the exhibition: (1) *Soil Stories*, where the public was invited to send in soil samples to be analysed for heavy metals and to be used in artistic production, (2) *Critically Endangered Species*, where a professional ceramist handcrafted large vessels from local clay which were then painted with the soil samples sent by the public, and (3) the phytoremediation experiment of the *Un/making Soil Communities* project.

Soil Stories invited the public to send in a small amount of soil from a personally meaningful location or a site with an interesting history. The heavy metal contents of the samples were measured in public soil scanning events, their place was marked on a large map, and the samples were numbered and put on display on a shelf. Finally, the soils were processed to clay slip and ceramic test pieces to see what colours they produce when fired to ceramics (Fig. 4).

The detailed formulated instructions for collecting samples requested an intimate encounter with a site-specific soil of one's interest: participants went to the place in

[5] The project *Soil Laboratory* involved collaboration with the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), the Geological Survey of Finland (GTK), and the Finnish Association for Rural Culture and Education (MSL). https://soil-laboratory.aalto.fi (accessed March 18th 2022).

Fig. 4 Test pieces were made of Finnish earthenware clay, dipped in the processed soil samples from around Finland and left to dry before firing (Photo: Tzuyu Chen)

question, carefully collected soil, removed sticks, leaves and other organic material, dried, packed and sent the soil to the museum. Additionally, they could send stories, maps and the related history of the site where they gathered the soil. Many samples originated from the senders' home plots and cottage sites. Also, soils were gathered from local places with an industrial past, such as former mines.

Ceramic artist Catharina Kajander coiled large ceramic vessels from Finnish red earthenware clay during the first three months of the exhibition in the *Soil Laboratory*. The artist was present six days a week, and the audience could follow the slow building and drying of several large clay vessels. Attention was directed at other-than-human species dependent on the wellbeing of the soil. The selection of species was based on an interview with a biodiversity specialist and the 'Finnish Red Book' (Finnish Environment Institute SYKE) on the viability of Finnish species in 2019. Maarit Mäkelä joined in with the painting of *Critically Endangered Species* on the crafted vessels using the slips that were processed from the soil samples (Fig. 5).

The third project continued the *Un/making Soil Communities* project. This time, the location was the Nuutajärvi Glass Village. First, the research team gathered and analysed soil samples to determine how the glass industry had affected the soil. Then, they selected three soil samples that were contaminated with different heavy metals for a phytoremediation experiment in the gallery space. One of the soils was rich in chromium. The other two samples indicated traces from the glass industry through

Fig. 5 The team of artists and researchers work in the Soil Laboratory during the exhibition's open hours (Photo: Riikka Latva-Somppi)

their lead and arsenic content. The researchers sowed seeds and took care of the plants during the opening hours of the museum. Towards the end of the exhibition, the plants were harvested, dried and analysed. Consequently, a correlation with the heavy metal contamination of the soils was indeed found. The public was invited to follow the activities in the *Soil Laboratory,* such as the two public soil scanning events (Fig. 6). The activities were also carefully documented and published on the laboratory website.

4 The *Soil Laboratory* as a Tool

The *Soil Laboratory* methodology combined three approaches: laboratory, fieldwork and exhibition. The laboratory metaphor is frequently used for (craft and) design projects and spaces that build on open and collaborative inquiries between stakeholders sharing the same interest (Binder, 2007). Similarly, the *Soil Laboratory* facilitated a platform for reflecting on the relationship between humans and soil in a co-active manner. Rather than exhibiting finished artefacts, it became a space where ongoing material explorations were shared with the public. These explorations

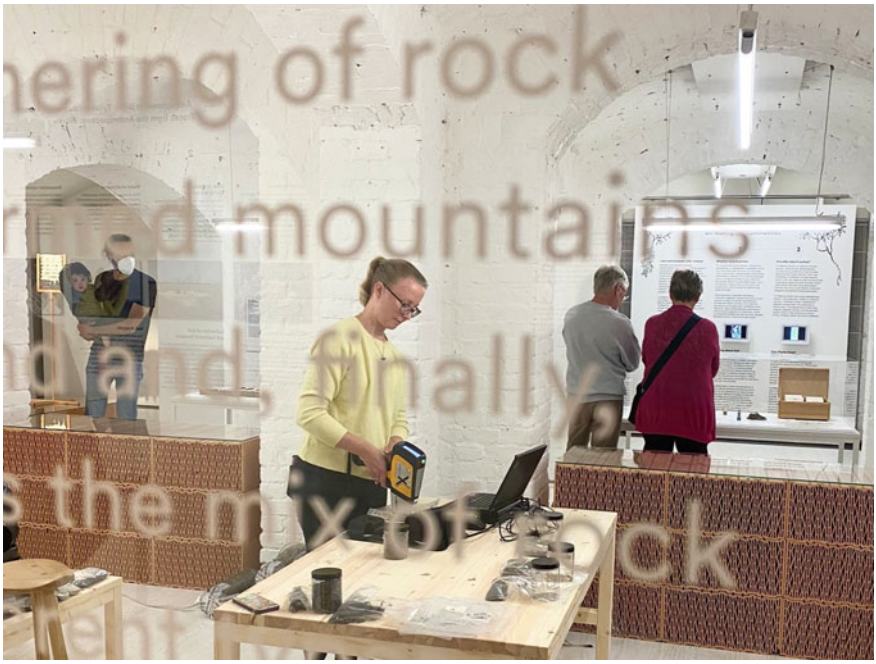

Fig. 6 Geologist Maarit Saresma from the Geological Survey of Finland measures heavy metals from soil during the *Soil Laboratory's* public soil scanning event (Photo: Design Museum Helsinki, Minni Soverila)

merged crafting with scientific methods from soil contamination and phytoremediation research that were carried out in collaboration with a geologist.[6] The project further included fieldwork, which, in design research, is typically conducted to learn how users make sense of the design product (Koskinen et al., 2008, p. 52). In this case, fieldwork meant exploring the contexts for the study. Consequently, the experiments were taken out to natural settings such as the Nuutajärvi area, involving residents and glass practitioners (Fig. 7). These experiments also became 'social objects' as exhibition visitors talked about them with the practitioners of the *Soil Laboratory*, and with each other while viewing the exhibition (Koskinen et al., 2008, p. 51). The audiences also engaged with the processes when they were asked to collect soil, send or bring it to the exhibition, and follow the *Soil Laboratory* website to retrieve the analysis. Finally, the exhibition space leant on the traditions of the art field, opening its practices to critical viewing and aesthetic evaluation, but also reflection and contemplation (Koskinen et al., 2008, p. 53).

[6] Design researchers Ilpo Koskinen, Thomas Binder and Johan Redström (2008) discuss 'Lab, Field and Gallery' as approaches adapted to design research from other established fields yet allowing a focus on design skills and processes.

Fig. 7 Author collecting soil for the phytoremediation experiment in Nuutajärvi with a local glass practitioner Sara Hulkkonen (Photo: Tzuyu Chen)

5 Learning with Soil

Museums are informal learning environments. They have pedagogical interests as well as obligations. Hence, in addition to the methodological approaches of laboratory, fieldwork and exhibition, the *Soil Laboratory* further included an educational element. As educators, we, the curators of the exhibition, shared the educational intention with the museum. Thus, the designed setting had communicative and pedagogical aims: providing an informal interactive space for learning and encouraging in-depth questioning (National Research Council [U.S.], 2009, p. 127) of soil relations.

The *Soil Laboratory* was thus designed to be a place of action that awakens curiosity, that is easy to approach and that has a sense of ongoingness. This was done by careful planning of opening hours, working tables and other research settings and displaying tools and materials such as processed soil, ceramic tests and enlarged images of endangered species. Moreover, an essential element was revealing the incompleteness of the work, and not staging processes but openly proceeding with them in real time.

Audience interaction was planned together with the Design Museum's experts of museum pedagogy. Further, the presence of the practitioners enabled questions to be answered and discussion with the exhibition visitors. Additionally, an expert lecture on clay soils of the Helsinki area was given by geologist Maarit Saresma from the Geological Survey of Finland. Furthermore, a lunch talk with the curators

Fig. 8 *Painting with Soil* workshop participants working with an array of soil processed to fine slip using sticks and brushes as their tools (Photo: Tzuyu Chen)

was streamed, and curators' tours were organised on-site for interest groups and online for the general public. Moreover, the *Soil Laboratory* hosted the making of an educational video where a ceramic artist discusses with a soil biodiversity expert.[7]

Painting with Soil workshops for families and specific groups with limited numbers of participants were designed and facilitated by one of the participating researchers, Tzuyu Chen. She first introduced the participants to the use of natural soils as a ceramic medium. Then, the participants were given prefabricated tile forms of Finnish red clay and soil materials from various locations in Finland (Fig. 8). While painting on the tiles, the participants learned the ways in which different minerals and metals in the local soils affect their colours. Further, various questions were answered, such as why Finnish clay is grey in its unfired state, but the fired bricks are reddish, and where white and yellow clay come from.

In addition to the museum's pedagogical approaches, a solid connection to university education was naturally present due to the researchers' affiliation. During the exhibition, Aalto University design students visited the exhibition on various occasions. Moreover, the Un/Making Studio collaboration resulted in the inclusion of a

[7] In the video, Urban Ecosystems professor Heikki Setälä discusses soil biodiversity with Maarit Mäkelä. The video was produced by the Forum for Environmental Information, Maj and Tor Nessling Foundation, Baltic Sea Action Group and Design Museum Helsinki. https://www.nessling.fi/soil-at-risk/2021/02/08/the-critters-in-the-soil-run-life-above-ground/ (accessed March 18th 2022).

visiting lecture on a Master's level course, named *Glass Challenge*, which was geared towards re-thinking the materiality of glass following the exhibition's themes.

6 Conclusions

I have reflected on the methodology of the *Soil Laboratory* and presented its contextual setting, the *Soil Matters* exhibition. The exhibition did not gather together just craft and design practitioners; instead, the majority of the projects were building on interdisciplinary collaborations. Involving practitioners who engage with the material and speculative meanings of soil was a conscious attempt to think collectively, to re-envision, and making these ways of working together visible carries a potential for better care, in this case, for soil (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2019, p. 395).

In the *Soil Laboratory*, we explored crafting experiences and emotions together with scientific facts of the environment in the gallery setting of the Design Museum. The methodology of the *Soil Laboratory* combined laboratory work, fieldwork, and an exhibition, and added a fourth essential element: education. The methodology originated from the idea that associating scientific thinking with engaging events and real-world outcomes may have personal significance (National Research Council [U.S.], 2009, p. 128) and result in ethical reflections.

Through public exhibitions, narratives that seek to re-imagine human–environment relations can be shared. The *Soil Laboratory* and its context, the *Soil Matters* exhibition, demonstrate that ceramic and glass practitioners possess a deep understanding of their working medium: clay, minerals and metals. A creative practitioner's ability and skill to feel, love and understand the materiality of their medium was central in communicating how soil extends from natural matter to material for creative practice. In addition, in the exhibition, design and craft practitioners were regarded as having responsibilities concerning addressing the consequences of their consumption and also the power to act accordingly.

Museums have established practices of making exhibitions and engaging the general public in discussions on important environmental and societal topics, communicating with the media, attaching stakeholders to projects, finding funding and engaging the public through museum pedagogy. They are institutions of authority with a prospect of societal influence. Using this potential increases the power of craft in its involvement in the politics of sustainability (see also Latva-Somppi, 2021). The study at hand brought craft and design projects into an institutional frame aiming at the creation of general reflection and societal impact. In this case, the institutional frame was reinforced by the affiliation with Aalto University and collaboration with environmental organisations.

Via the exhibition *Soil Matters*, I propose that craft and design exhibitions can be used to discuss wider environmental and societal phenomena through the knowledge generated from within the field, to enhance a caring attitude. Craft offers a tool to engage with the aesthetics of matter and the intimacy of making. It can also be used

to critically examine its connections to material production and the consumption of natural materials.

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