**A care package, a cooking session, a podcast: some notes on artistic research and practice**

**MFA first year students with Cannach MacBride**

Throughout 2021–22, the first year fine art students at the Piet Zwart Institute participated in a research practices seminar called “Proseminar: Researching and writing from the middle of somewhere.” We met monthly to talk, listen, read, write, eat, make, learn from one another, learn about one another, and learn with one another.

At the end of the year we worked on three shared traces of this time.

The first trace was a care package of gifts for one another: each person made gifts or led a workshop where we learned how to make something to put in the care packages. This trace was intended to mainly live within the group but there is one spare package available to borrow in the Piet Zwart library.

The second trace was a meal that we cooked for the students in the year above and took to them while they were installing their graduation exhibition: light, fresh, salty, spicy, garlicky, herby foods.

Images of both of these traces are threaded through the text below. You can find a little, always incomplete, contextual information in the image descriptions.

The third trace is the podcast and transcript shared here. This was intended to be a more public trace than the two described above. Each person responded to the following questions.

1. What is artistic research (to you)?

2. Who and what nourishes and supports your artistic research?

3. Can you share something important that you learned this year?

4. What would you like to share from your learning this year that might nourish and support others?

The recordings were made during a period of high covid infection, which you can hear in places. We hope you might find something for yourself amongst them.

Made by Sarah Atzori, Gloriya Avgust Panova, Gabi Dao, Nadine Ghandour, Ifigeneia Ilia-Georgiadou, Helle Lindskog, Gweni Llwyd, Marlee McMahon, Tiago Santos, Jeltje Schuurmans, Miriam Del Seppia, Agata Sznurkowska. With Cannach MacBride. We were also accompanied along parts of the way by Johanna Brunner and Stefano Fusani.

[Image description for image 1: The image shows the legs and hands of Gabi and Nadine who are leaning over neatly stacked piles of paper laid out in sequence on the floor. They are adding pages into multiples of an unbound publication. There is a feeling of movement, activity, and speed in their postures and gestures. The publication is the fruit of a workshop led by Nadine and Helle.]

**Audio transcript**

Helle:

I wanted to talk about practice instead of artistic research because I guess it's more of a word that I relate to. I want to talk about doing. But now I'm relating to a gigantic ear instead.

Helle's friend:

Maybe that's a way to relate or to segue into it...

Helle:

...a gigantic ear…

[bouncy, 4/4 rhythm, played as a repeated chord on a synthesizer kicks in, runs for a few bars, and then cuts suddenly]

Gweni:

For me, artistic research is like swimming through a vast, endless, bubbling metabolism. Maybe if you picture a big, spitting pool of lava inside the core of a planet, or how the inside of your stomach looks an hour after helping yourself to an all you can eat buffet, and you're just a tiny atomic speck buzzing around amongst it all, swimming and swimming and never reaching the shore. And tides can be high in there, there's smouldering pools of thoughts, ideas, and actions whizzing about all around you. And when you inspect them, you discover they're made up of many more interactions, connections, clashes, and reactions, shifting through time and space.

You keep swimming until you realise this metabolism is part of infinite larger metabolisms. Your tiny atomic body flows through one pool and into the next and back again.

Marlee:

Question number one, what is artistic research to you? I've been thinking about this question a little bit and I think it's kind of hard to answer, but I think for me anything that feeds me feels like artistic research, just having my eyes open and being open to different things. Yeah. But then in a more practical sense, walking, listening to music, listening to podcasts, talking with people; painting, physically, it feels like research.

Nadine:

I used to dislike this term, because of how it was used as some kind of branding with arts institutions. But I started to think about research that is critical of sources, of the archive and institution, and the kind that takes emotion, tone, relationships, sensory experiences, and things that are impossible to concisely summarise seriously, research that can be playful with form and display, and that is sensitive in process. Now, you might say that these things apply to research in general and that might be true, but I feel like I've only experienced research within an art setting. Maybe artistic research is just research done by an artist and maybe that's an easier definition to give.

Ifigeneia:

Artistic research, to me, is when I have a concern or a specific topic and I want to deepen into it, and I do that with various mediums. I usually collect information about it through reading or asking people who have some knowledge on this specific topic, and this is how I'm doing my artistic research.

Tiago:

To answer this question, I am of course influenced by other people's views on it and the kind of legacy that it has within academia. I would probably say that it's important to break down this term by saying what is the artistic and what is the research? So the artistic or the artist would be someone that works through subjectivity, through sensations, imagination and is interested in creating worlds. And the researcher is someone who does research and looks at things through a more analytical, objective, factual, and critical lens. So the figure of the artistic researcher would be someone who fuses both of these approaches and negotiates them.

Gabi:

Artistic research for me is exploring different ways of knowing and being and relating in the world that don't need to lean on the empirical structures of data and numbers and such clear cut answers, and allowing yourself to stew in the messiness and fragmentation of questions.

Miriam:

For me, artistic research is a part of art practice. And if I start from art practice, I think it's the ways I find to stay in the world: activities, ways of doing that are ways of being connected and live in relation. And artistic research is part of this, it has to do with interest, fascination, and curiosity about something. Research is pushing the art practice towards or around something, trying to move forward and understand pieces of something, and going on into what I don't know yet about. Artistic research is an approach of questioning, trying to learn, it can be about understanding more material aspects of life I want to investigate. For me, usually, it's about intimacy and care, ancient knowledges, and plants and colours.

Artistic research can be done in many different ways, from walking, listening, staying with the person next to you, experiencing life, but also reading, listening to people that know more than you, or different than you. It can also be about finding other artists that your practice resonates with, connecting to the research of other scientists, of people, of philosophers, of your mother. Something that other people are trying to understand and create a knowledge about it in their life and connecting to their doing, pushing your practice forwards toward the unknown.

Jeltje:

Artistic research, to me, is a way of discussing or approaching important topics within our society by using different angles of approach through the field of arts, and so achieving various outcomes – outcomes, we can learn from, or just holding up a mirror to the beholder addressing important topics. Doing research through art is important to me. I can help others and myself as an artist in multiple ways.

Gweni:

So research for me is to constantly listen, navigate, digest, shift, and change. I research in lots of ways. I think I speak, I write, I read, I spend hours on the internet, I draw, I walk, I breathe, I listen, I make images and noises, I cry, I watch films, I play video games, I make a mess, I invite people to play, I try to connect the dots.

Agata:

Okay, so I'm walking while I'm recording. Artistic research for me this year seemed to be all about getting distracted. So it was about putting myself in a situation where I decided, oh, I'm going to do this thing for let's say thirty minutes, one hour, and it would be reading, it would be walking, and then finding a distraction that proved to be inspirational for me. So we read a book on something and then you see one word in this book and it makes you think of something else, or you decide to do this repetitive gesture but then in the representative gesture, you get distracted and it activates a trail of thought that goes completely somewhere else. Yeah, it's quite inefficient for me to have a goal; I want to have a goal, but it never works out. So I think I need to make up a goal and then fail to achieve it but achieve maybe something else that I can use elsewhere.

Gloriya:

Carried by the river's streams – floating on my back, eyes closed, ears dipping in and out of the water, as the river is braiding itself. Sometimes it would be my mouth weaving a melody in anticipation for words to fall into the cold stream like hot, molten aluminium. Sometimes it would be my ancestors pulling threads from beneath the ground, causing seismic waves to vibrate through the ways in which I'm operating, leading to cracks and floods and springs within my selfhood…to only re-build what I consider a sense of stability.

Helle:

And then I was thinking about my knife that I'm always keeping on my desk. It's red with a wooden handle and very sharp, but always a little bit rusty. I've been thinking the whole year that I really want to practice in sharpening this knife. I often go to a workshop, to the wood workshop, or, I was also spending a month in Finland on a residency and then I also met a knife guy, a Finnish lumberjack. We bonded about knives and he also showed me how to sharpen the knife, which is really a skill I want to practice or learn more about, because it's something about...I don't know if giving care to a tool is the right word but...appreciate your tools and in that way take care of them. And I think that's why I'm keeping this knife on on my desk because it feels like a basic tool that you can use for everything.

[Image description for image 2: A clothes drying rack with small, vibrantly coloured pieces of wet fabric dripping water onto the floor. The fabric pieces are crying tissues sewed by Miriam. They are hand dyed with plant pigments in a workshop led by Miriam and Helle.]

Nadine:

Who and what supports your artistic research? Friends, and Google Sheets of lists of authors, artists, and texts I hold dear. Funnily enough, I've taken more than I like to admit from family conversations. And my family's reaction to my artwork, and my family who are not artists reaction to my artwork. I spent four years in a library so I'm really partial to that particular collection I used to work at. I've also met artists who have been incredibly generous with conversations and there's been a few in general that I hold very, very, very dear to me.

Marlee:

Um, I think speaking to other artists is really helpful for me, about ideas. I find like other people's input really feels like a very direct sense of support. But then I also think things like sleeping and having joy in my life through...for me, I get a lot of joy from the act of painting so I think that's what nourishes my research, or helps me digest other research in a way. My favourite thing to do probably is listen to music and paint, or listen to podcasts and paint, I really think that feels really nourishing for me as a person.

Ifigeneia:

Everything can nourish my artistic research. It can be a single word, or a story, a walk, an image, a text, or anything that can inspire me.

Gabi:

What nourishes and supports artistic practice? I think largely it's community for me, community of humans and nonhumans and the ways in which these things come together to steward hope and to just keep going, whether it's day by day or minute by minute.

Tiago:

I don't know if I can answer that question. I would say that everything impacts and affects the things I do. I wouldn't call it artistic research; perhaps the term art practice based research is more adequate because I think that through the practice of an art one can make research and actually find or encounter things, and this notion breaks down this loaded term and the dualism it suggests that I mentioned earlier.

I think that the people supporting my practice are the ones that are willing to dedicate time to it, the ones that are more close to me at the moment, and are willing to listen to my occasional nonsense, and that are willing to communicate from there. But of course, there are people who, despite being distant, sometimes whisper things in my ear, and that also counts.

Jeltje:

My own experiences lay the foundation for my artistic research. It is my starting points. Here, I always will find my intrinsic motivation to proceed my research. Also being supported by my family and friends.

Miriam:

Love, people I'm fond of, the love of my partner, the presence of my sisters, some friends, artist friends. Love keeps me curious and wanting to understand more. Then, my body – moving it, listening to it – somehow nourishes my imagination. And then there are, of course, some authors and thinkers and books. I'm actually always reading multiple books at a time without ever finishing one. But, for the last year, or for the last weeks, I want to mention as supporters and nourishers for my research Silvia Federici, philosopher; Stefano Mancuso, botanist; the article on multilayered selves by Vanessa Andreotti; and then I want to mention Hannah Ryggen, about whom I'm currently reading a book.

Gweni:

What nourishes and supports my artistic research are the places I inhabit or have inhabited, the trees, plants, objects, people, creatures, devices that I know or have encountered. They offer a grounding, and from there, I can go deeper in and out of realms and worlds.

Gloriya:

Early mornings, in silence, when everyone is still asleep, and the sun hasn't fully risen yet. Woken up by a dream or a sense of urgency – this is when I feel most powerful and open and it's usually when I do my best writing. Doesn't happen that often, but when it does, it's so so precious.

Discovering the voices I love to read has really led me to working with words myself and performing, and using the mouth as a tool to channel the voices that are alive within my selfhood, but also to exploring physical materials with a similar sensibility to that of massaging and morphing language. This year the voices of Hélène Cixous, Clarice Lispector, Ursula K. Le Guin, Etel Adnan, Quinn Latimer, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and my mother, who is always intrinsically present, have really helped me shape my path and have given me so much strength along the way.

Agata:

I think good people with good intentions nourish and support my artistic research. Because I think there's a lot of self doubt and guilt when you're making things, or exploring how to make things, and people who assure you make it more comfortable to make mistakes. So it's like statistics, you explore more or you get lost multiple times on the way but there are these people who are guidance for you so even when you get lost you can always go back and you feel safe. Safety is important. There's a tendency to believe that discomfort is good, but I think you need to have a certain comfort to allow yourself to feel discomfort; it cannot be discomfort all the time.

Helle:

I've been also interested recently in this way of working with wood when you're using the knife so that you have to work with the fibres of the wood, you can't cut it like a saw with a straight angle, you have to work with the wood, how the tree was grown in a way. And maybe that's a way of understanding a material or getting closer to it, as well as spending time in a forest and understanding what the forest is, or spending time in disturbed forests because that's mostly the forest I know.

I guess I'm coming back to this month I spent in Finland this year where I was deep in the countryside in mid Finland and I was living close to this very, very old forest where long lichens were growing on the trees, and it was this kind of forest where trees from growing on dead trees, a tree on top of another tree and falling down and then a new tree. A messy forest in the way it was so old, looking a bit like Lord of the Rings. And I'm thinking about connecting where the materials come from that I'm working with in my studio...

[Image description for image 3: A view into the container of a bakfiets cargo tricycle. The container is filled with jars of gazpacho and a huge bowl of cucumber and chilli salad. The food is on route to delivery as a lunch package to art students who are installing their graduation exhibition. It was made by their colleagues who are not graduating.]

Tiago:

Well, this year, I think I've learned a lot of things, which have been very important, but it's not like I've learned them and now I have this kind of know how, it's more like a continuous process of teaching myself these things. I think one very important aspect is listening to other people and understanding – and not only understanding but respecting as well – other points of view, and not having this constant urge to say something in order to be correct. And in that sense, listening also has taught me about my imperfections, let's say.

Also, I've learned a bit about gardening and about making things and caring about making things. Yeah, that's about it. I mean, there's way more that I could share, but think I think it's okay like this.

Gweni:

Something important I learned this year is how the pace of my practice and research is constantly shifting and that's okay. There's never simply one way of working, or a one size fits all model. There are times when I can't stop making, even if I wanted to and other times where I need to hide in bed for a day to survive. Things can be slow, things can be fast. There's so much pressure to constantly produce when you're an artist in a studio and when you're not producing, you may feel guilty, but don't give into the guilt. Everything's just fine.

Jeltje:

The most important experience of this year is trying to let go of control and my perfectionism, to take risks and see what happens.

Miriam:

I learned some advices to myself that I already knew about, but I learned them again. They are: give more time to what you do; try not to judge and try not to destroy it too early; listen more; and you know you have to listen to your senses, to your body, but sometimes you forget and then you always miss something and you lose your focus; and maybe rest more.

Ifigeneia:

This year, I learned so many things. One important thing that I learned has to do with my inner self. Most of the time I've worked with a specific plan in mind, like a project, and I realised that this is not good because I set my own self boundaries. So everyone advised me to work in parallel projects at the same time. And as Bernd said, I have to protect the I don't know.

Marlee:

I learned a lot this year. I learned that writing doesn't have to be so difficult or so scary. I think I've learned a lot about myself, yeah, I think I understand my sensibilities a lot better than I used to. But I've also learned things like playing basketball is really fun, my Dutch isn't very good, I'm quite a slow person. Yeah, I learned a lot.

Agata:

Maybe I learned that it isn't always necessary to rush into finishing things unless you're afraid of dying the next day – there's time so maybe it's okay to have a lot of new beginnings that might finalise one day, but for now you can just let them be and if you want to go to a different direction then just go there. Yeah, I think it was good to me this year.

Gabi:

Something important that I learnt this year, actually something important that I learned these past years is: you're not in it alone.

Nadine:

Try it once, don't leave your bag at the back of your bike unsecured, don't travel with all of your cards on you every day, and orzo is wonderful to cook with.

Helle:

I'm realising that...I mean, I come from a place where there is a lot of forest and a lot of forest industry but still I felt this was the first time I was in an old forest that actually...where the biotope is...it's not...how could you say it?...it's not working...oh my god here I really lost it, I'm looking for a word.

Helle's friend:

Which word?

Helle:

I'm feeling like I was like really romanticising this old forest but maybe that's the wrong way...I was thinking about the forest that is the forest of the forest industry. When I was a kid, I learned that every tree that was cut down in Sweden was replaced with another tree; you replant the trees and then you get this other type of forest. There is no lichen hanging on the trees in those forests and that's the forest I know in a way. You see these forests when you're travelling by train through Scandinavia and the Nordic countries, or many other places, I guess – you just make a clear cut and then you plant new trees, and there is where the materials come from. But I think it was so good to spend time in the forest and just kind of trash my romantic dream about where my materials were coming from, that they're actually from these very industrialised places, which is also the place where Anna Tsing is talking about in *The Mushroom and at the End of the World*, but she's talking about it in another way.

I feel I often need to spend time with things, spend time with the wood, with the wood and also spending time in the woods, and spending time with my knife. I guess that's in a way how I relate to practice.

Gloriya:

This year I've learned that by sharing your vulnerability, there is potential for bringing the group closer. I was reminded that essentially, we are one “formless formation” (I'm stealing that term from Sandra Ruiz) that is in a constant process of exchange.

I've also learned that your soul communicates through the body and you should take good care of it. The more you neglect your fundamental needs, the more your body is going to suffer.

And last but not least, feeling is healing, it's important to allow yourself the space for that.

[Image description for image 4: A plastic folder sits on a display shelf in a library. The folder has a label that says, CARE PACKAGE, MADE BY Y1 2021–2022, USE AS NEEDED. Inside the folder are various small objects and papers.]

Nadine:

What would you like to share from your learning this year that might nourish and support others? Do it slowly. Everything will eventually pass. Speak up for yourself. You can manifest it all. Pay someone to help you with your taxes, which I haven't done but I wish I had because you will save money compared to the fines that you'd get otherwise. And I'm aware that this is all starting to sound like cheesy Pinterest motivation quotes, which is not really acceptable uncritically in an art setting. But, a bit of motivational quote a) never hurt anybody b) you would be surprised but sometimes they work.

Tiago:

I think the the one thing I would like to share the most that might help someone else perhaps, or at least that's my intention, is just a reminder that we are all humans and we are all a congregation of a lot of stuff, very complex systems where there are traumas and things that have affected the way we behave. I think it's important to be aware of those things and I guess I'm saying this because we tend to forget about them. Yeah, that's it.

And to finish off, I would like to say a very cliched sentence that I've recently heard, which is, success is preparation meeting opportunity so be prepared.

Marlee:

The first thing I thought of was some advice given to me by an artist and that was to trust pleasure in the studio. I think, for me, that really resonated and was a really helpful thing to hear in order to get me out of my head and that really helped me. But also maybe to go easier on yourself or something. I think it's easy to become my own worst enemy and I can imagine other people feel similarly. And that is all.

Miriam:

I want to share the practice of slow walk that we practiced with Cannach during the seminar on listening and that I find always useful for focusing, feeling my body, opening my senses, and thinking. Whenever you need, you just take some time for walking and extremely slow down as much as you can. Maybe you reach a point where you don't know anymore when you will set your foot down on the floor from one step to the other, and you expand the movement till feeling and enjoying every millimetre of it, feeling the smallest part of a millimetre of a micrometre and finding a whole universe of time and space in it.

Ifigeneia:

This year I really felt that I challenged myself and I embraced my fears. And yeah, I think it's just great to go for the things you love and embrace your thoughts, your inner concerns, meet new people, go to a new country, it just feels great.

Jeltje:

You limit yourself by letting your inner critic take over. It won't do your practice any good by being too hard on yourself. Take risks within your practice and treat yourself with kindness. Be gentle but sharp.

Gweni:

Something from this year's learning that might nourish and support others is to remember to breathe. [Breathe in. Hold. Breathe out.] It's as easy as that.

Agata:

Whatever works. I mean, do whatever works. This can be my motto from this year for the rest of my life or even outside of art – people's different modes of living, relationships, working. Just do whatever works, with the limitation of not affecting other beings in a negative way; if it affects other beings in a negative way, then it means it's not working. But just, whatever works.

Gabi:

Something that I would like to share from my learning this year that might nourish and support others is that helping and supporting each other is a skill that we all get better at if we practice it often. And also, that we're all just trying to do our best. And that more always equals more.

[bouncy, 4/4 rhythm, played as a repeated chord on a synthesizer kicks in, runs for a few bars, and then Sarah starts speaking/singing over the top, while the intensity of the music amps up a bit with some key changes and phaser effects that sound like lasers firing in an old sci-fi movie]

Sarah:

What is artistic research for me? Experimentation, listening, collecting, hungry for information, archiving, getting out of the box, researching the less obvious things, not trying to go directly to the point but being open to different perspectives, even far from my practice, trusting others, going dancing, watching a movie, cooking, sleeping until noon after a hangover, but also reading boring books, masturbating, taking care of your skin, crying, playing with children, running, shouting, singing loudly and, again, shouting, reminding me that life is just one YOLO, call my sister on the phone even if she won't answer, tell your dad you're a grown up now, you know how he feels, thanks even for having special friends with who I think I could change the world, stop judging me in the mirror and just seeing my flaws, play chess, go to see art exhibitions, listen to music, learn how to move without Google Maps, detox from social media, go to concerts, meet new people, and don't forget to give water to plants.

[Image description for image 5: Papers and small objects from the care package spread out on the floor. A crying tissue from Miriam and Helle’s workshop. A jar of calendula balm made by Gabi with calendula brought from Turtle Island. Instructions for stretching exercises made by Sarah. A hand made badge on a tiny canvas made in a workshop led by Marlee. A package of charcoal Tiago made at a fire in Gabi’s garden. A small matchbox with tiny objects inside made by everyone during a workshop led by Gweni. Some herbal incense made by Agata with wild plants from Rotterdam. A drawing and a handwritten story exchanged during a workshop led by Ifi. A piece of resin with plant matter embedded in it made during a workshop led by Jeltje. A publication open at a page made by Nadine saying: IT’S NOT ABOUT FINDING A BOOK…IT’S ABOUT LOOKING FOR A BOOK.]