

USEFOOL Art&Craft in Residence - Project Proposal

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Description: "Talking Objects between Encoding, Protection and Wonder"

Estimate of required time: 3 months, preferably from April to June

Estimate of required materials: tbc

Description: "Talking Objects between Encoding, Protection and Wonder"

In an age of immediate and pervasive communication, of constant exposure and lack of secrecy, my curiosity was triggered by the art of concealment and encoding rooted in the Mediaeval Arabo-Islamic culture. In this context, I intend to explore the tradition of "talking objects", that is objects that bear inscriptions or messages, for those who know how to access and interpret them.

There are 3 phases to the project, divided as follows:

A: study and replication of two writing-related stratagems used to secret the content of a message (phase 1 + phase 2)

B: production of independent work inspired by the research of the UseFool Project (phase 3)

Key Reference text:

Al-Iskandarī, Al-ḥiyal al-bābiliyya ('The Book of Babylonian Stratagems')

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Phase 1. On the alteration of writing - Prayer beads

(Month of April)

Precedent: For several years, I have cultivated a strong interest in ceramic art and have created individual works in this field. I collaborate with the Atelier CreaViva, where I contribute to the design and facilitation of ceramic workshops for children and teenagers. Atelier CreaViva is a creative space that explores a wide range of artistic techniques and materials, including drawing, painting, ceramics, photography, glass fusion, and textile arts. Additionally, the atelier promotes and organizes exhibition events and art shows, offering a platform for creative expression.

Replication

Realization of an Islamic *taṣbīḥ* (string of prayer beads) carrying hidden messages, replicating the stratagem on the alteration of writing described by al-Iskandarī (cf. Lucia Raggetti, *Un coniglio nel turbante*, p. 157).

The material chosen for the beads is clay.

Two different prayer beads can be made:

-a larger one, like those placed in some mosques

-a smaller one, for personal use

The former will have a rich finishing and will carry a fixed message, the latter will be realized with unexpensive material and it will be possible to compose different messages, in order to show how the encryption mechanism worked and could be adapted.

Possibility of a demonstration/live workshop session in making ceramic beads at the *CreaViva* atelier or in the Project's premises.

For this part of the project, I would consider to come to Bologna 3 times per month.

Materials

To be sourced from Ceramic & Colours in Faenza: clays, ceramic glazes, kanthal wire

Provided by me: assorted brushes, tools used to work with clay, refractory material supports for ceramic kiln, ceramic kiln and ceramic firings.

Examples:

Red clay majolica 7,50 € + iva

Black semi-refractory F4 37 € + iva

Earthenware 11 € + iva

White gres 10 € + iva
Ceramic glazes and coatings 14 € + iva each
Kanthal wire 5 metres: 29,5 € + iva
Self-glazing turquoise paste: 22,80 € + iva

Phase 2. On the alteration of writing - Fringed sash belt

(Month of May)

Precedent: I am currently investigating the production and use of natural dyes and the tradition of making ink with organic materials. I have experience in dyeing vegetal and animal fibers. In January, I took part in a textile residency in Peru, where I was able to learn the ancient technique of backstrap weaving.

Replication

Realization of a silk fringed sash, replicating the one described in the Arabic text (cf. Lucia Raggetti, *Un coniglio nel turbante*, p. 158). It contains an encoded message, based on the association between coloured threads, knots and letters with specific groups of letters from the Arabic alphabet.

This phase would include a discussion of the Arabic sources with the Project Team, in order to define the interaction between textual tradition, possible material reality, and actual craftsmanship.

For this part of the project, I would consider to come to Bologna 2 times per month.

Materials

To be sourced: Natural yarn, skeins of wool and silk, silk threads, golden threads, polyester macrame cord, spools and stick shuttles, a weaving comb and some materials for dyeing, like alum and indigo.

Provided by me: looms, previously hand-dyed yarns, dyeing substances which I collected myself.

Phase 3. Personal interpretation of a talismanic shirt

(Month of June)

Invention

Realization of a magical tunic, drawing inspiration from the ancient Islamic tradition of talismanic shirts and from the fireproof garment described by al-Iskandarī (cf. Lucia Raggetti, *Un coniglio nel turbante*, p. 119).

It will be the union of several artistic techniques: sewing, natural dyeing, calligraphy, embroidery.

For this part of the project, I would consider to come to Bologna once a month.

Materials

To be sourced: some pigments and inks, technical drawing pens (isograph, fineliner)

Provided by me: cotton fabric, hand-dyed fabrics