

The Gáffestallan methodology

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Introduction

The Gáffestallan methodology is a visual essay written by Åsa Andersson Martti, Elena Mazzi, Janne Sirniö after their collective intervention presented at *Hurricanes & Scaffolding* Symposium in December 2024 at Umeå University, Sweden.

The Gáffestallan methodology was presented as part of the panel Sustainable Place-making in Sápmi & the Nordics (umu.se), convened by Lisa Nyberg, UmArts Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Fine Art.

The panel was organized to host a space outside of the campus buildings in the form of a tentipi on the riverbank. Here presentations took the form of conversations and exchanges around the fire. All researchers/artists invited had indigenous standpoint, methodology and addressed the space from a perspective of reciprocity and respect for the land.

The Gáffestallan methodology focused on the importance of elements involved and called to be present with human partici-

pants. In Gáffestallan, (meaning a philosophical coffee break with reasoning), the heat of the fire as a relationship-maker is exchanged, sustained, and received. It aligns with the Vérdde system of mutual reciprocity, thriving in gestures of generosity and trust. The Vérdde system, (meaning friend-guest-guest-friend) operates within a value-based structure of balance and knowledge passed on from generation to generation.

Gáffestallan, the ritual of pausing along a journey to share stories and food, acknowledges the road travelled and the presence of those who have walked it with you. There is a quiet magic in such exchanges, where time slows down, and conversations settle into the rhythm of flickering flames and shared silences. The Gáffestallan became then a methodology, not to teach but to share, and the academic format therefore changed with it, giving it a different time and space.

To give warmth, whether through fire, food, or hospitality, is a recognition that everyone, at some point, needs the kindness of others. To step into Gáffestallan is to enter a world shaped by sharing. Just as an apprentice refines their craft, a traveller must first learn the rhythm of the road, the value of a campfire, and the meaning of a shared moment.

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Leaving the “engineer tech cult” meaning the patriarchal, colonial, hierarchical, majority culture which is the world we live in. Imagine the dramaturgy of the hero's journey, where the participants travel far, far away from the “civilized” world to enter “another, ancient and sacred world”. Imagine leaving the industrial world, walking over a snowy lawn towards a river bank to enter the portal to the **lávvu** (the Sámi tent). Even if the physical distance is short, it will transform you into lávvu mode, lávvu thinking, and lávvu feeling. Perhaps to a state of soulfulness and communion?

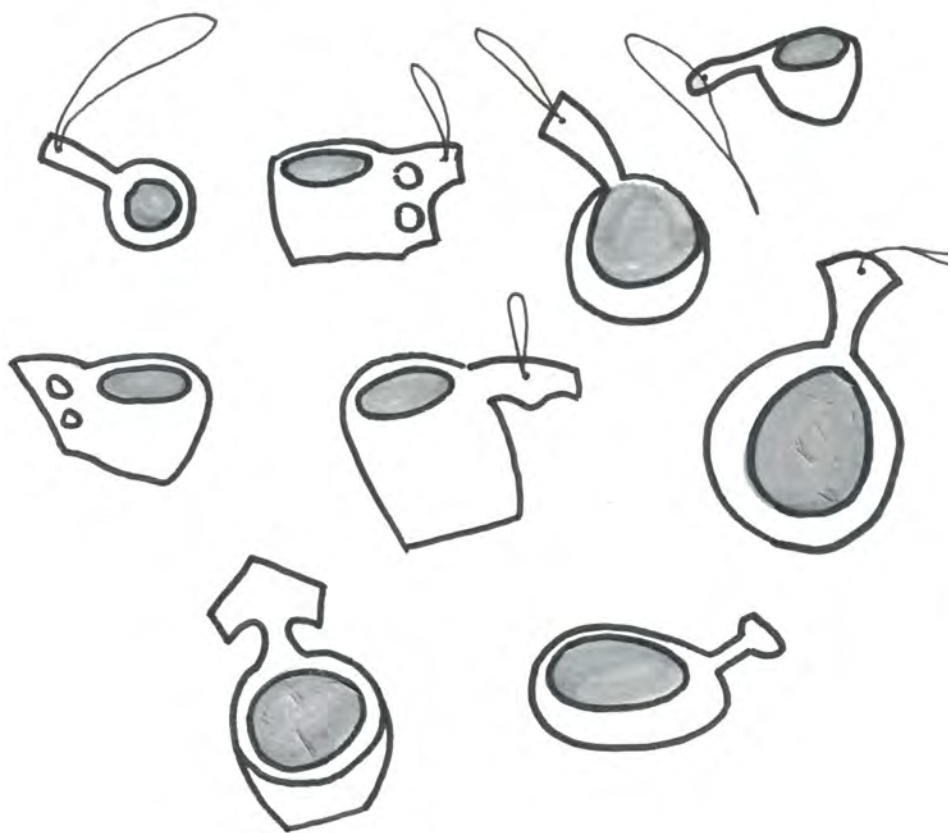


Under the threshold of the lávvu, the goddess Uksáhkká, **protector** of home and lávvu, guardian of liminality, fireplace, food, and children, resides. She will watch over you, maybe judge, approve and welcome you into the circle. She is one of the three daughters of the great Mother Earth, Mattáráhkká. Uksáhkkás sisters, also living within the lávvu are Sáráhkká, protector of women and children, a midwife for humans and reindeers and more. Juoksáhkká, the bow goddess of hunting, lives deep inside the lávvu, opposite the door, at the altar - taboo for humans to step over. She is the guardian of the sacred Sámi drum, hunting weapons, and hunting.





Tarot card eight in pentacles showed up, a person chiseling out **form and shape**, very focused as if meditating, with the civilization far behind in the horizon. The person sits by a huge tree, it is an Axis Mundi or tree of life, which is visible in the lávvu when the smoke pillar from the fire rises towards the smoke hole above to meet the universe outside. When a beam of light hits the smoke, the Axis Mundi, the center and pillar, shows up as temporary stability, like life itself. Eight of Coins mirrors the cultivation of skills through patience, methodology and immersion. We build our visions and dreams.



The lávvu is a warm, circular, archaic, very humane and welcoming space with a crackling living fireplace, and a warm **guksi** (wooden cup) of gáffe (coffee). To invite people into a lávvu encourage sharing and invoking stories, reasoning, and community. As the number eight has a softness to it, it is the sign of eternity, it can inspire to materializing inner work, thoughts and inspiration, maybe transform ideas into something solid. The coffee, resting and cooling in guksi, embodies this conversion. Its dark surface reflects, evoking something deeper, like a doorway, like the drumskin or the serene, reflecting surface of a sacred **Saivo** lake's realm. As we gaze into it, our minds wander, effortlessly slipping through past, present, and future. Our awareness mediates between different realities, the shared presence of others in the lávvu, and the mysterious worlds beyond.



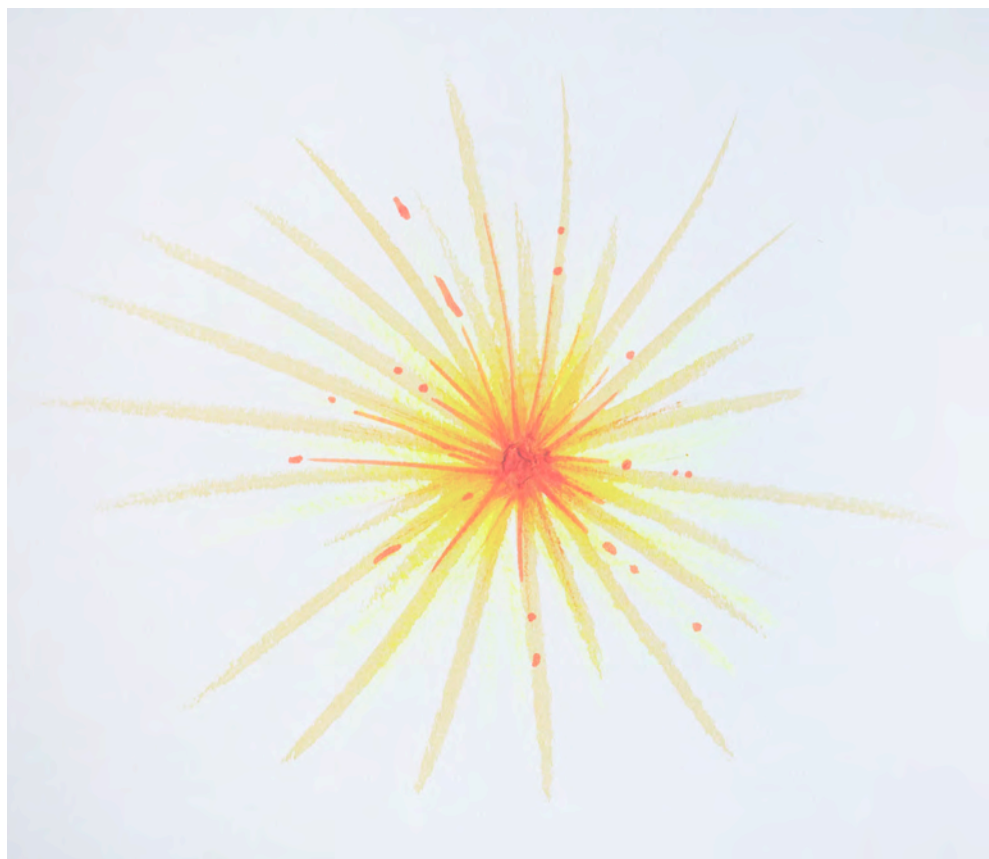
It is important to leave **silent gaps** in between words in a lávvu. To listen to “the other presence,” to nature. They, the non-humans, need time to think and answer. As we also do. In order to **in-spire** us, and just breathe in air together, so we hear the voices of others and the other.



There is something deep when looking at the **fire**. It brings you back to humanity's origins: being mesmerised by the flickering movements and sounds. Fire is a storyteller **elementary** with an agency (it consumes and warms), fire is a signifier of something sacred to humans: the spark that inspires and helps to detect the unseen, to discover new things. It offers protection against harsh natural environments for most of us, but in other hands fire can be a beast. Fire is associated with warmth, food and community. Fire is a being, one that makes you feel less alone. When you light a candle it is as if there is a presence in the flame. In an Arctic environment, especially during the polar night, fire, stars and Aurora Borealis are the lights that keep us alive. The fire welcomes and brings attention, asking for participation, engagement, and a willingness to understand what has been given before and what might be given next.



Gáffestallan methodology can be represented by the Lovers, number six, community, warmth, and a safe space. At the **heart** is the human connection. The Lovers embodies the relationships that shape our path, our choices following, our values, and the trust that fosters communion. **Love** is holy and makes us whole; it is about recognising that life is intertwined with others and that no one needs to walk alone. It is creativity, it includes everything, it's transformative, empathic and unites the conscious realms with the subconscious. It is democratic and equal. Love can be a subversive act in a world where empathy is losing ground and authoritarianism grows. We need more indigenous “**lávvu**” methodology.



Heat, in this way, is about presence. There is a distinction between heat that burns and heat that comforts. In the harsh Arctic winters, warmth is essential rather than a luxury. Warmth is given unconditionally, not as a favour, but as recognition of our shared existence. Gáffestallan does not endure for its own sake but provides warmth to nurture human **relationships**. Gáffestallan can be a moment of shared stillness, or a lively discussion, reminding us that our journey through life is not meant to be taken alone. The heart of Gáffestallan teaches us that the tales shared by the fire and the hands that extend warmth are what stays with us.



Smoke is a signal and a sign visible from afar that shows others the way to the lávvu where something is brewing. You know its presence when you smell it. You feel its sting when it comes into your eyes. And you taste its flavour when eating something that has been prepared over a fireplace. Smoke can lead you to find **shelter** in the storm.



The last Tarot card to participate is number two, looking like number eight. Two is when opposites attract, heaven and earth, and good and bad in communion. Two is a feminine number. Corresponding to birth something (even an idea), it is one split in two, it is balancing the world. It asks how we can **balance** between opposite worldviews? Two of Coins represents the ongoing **dance** between realities, the art of keeping things in motion while maintaining balance. In the Vérdde system, the exchange is about fluidity, trust, and understanding that life is unpredictable. Gáffestallan operates similarly, allowing moments of sharing and renewal before the journey continues. This balance also reminds us that happiness is a balancing act. The stories exchanged by the fire continue into new chapters, passed on to other travellers, other guests. To feel happy in this context is to live within the rhythm of giving, receiving, and moving forward within the balance between chaos and order.



Bubbling **water** in a smoky pan over the fire blended with voices and the elemental energy. As the water boils, the coffee is prepared: silence and mutual expectation mixed with grounds stirred into the heat. Few things taste as good as fresh coffee brewed over a blazing fire, with smokiness entwined with the memories. It is a sacred ritual. Water, like fire, flows, shifts, and transforms. In the Gáffestallan, boiling water over fire becomes a ritual of elemental alchemy, merging past, present, and future. Preparing coffee invites patience, love, and mutual presence, with gathered voices. Heat unlocks the essence of the coffee, mirroring inner transitions. Water embodies memory and movement, reflecting unseen shifts, initiating cleansing and new beginnings. In lávvu, it merges with the earth in a sacred cycle. This rite reconnects people to the land, fire, and one another. In Gáffestallan, water is a force of **transformation**.



Within the lávvu, **shadows** spring to life as the fire dances, casting figures across the walls. For children, it presents a world of marvels. Hands morph into animals, birds ascending towards the smoke hole, or fishes passing through. Shadows evolve and expand, giving rise to new creatures and tales. The lávvu transforms into a portal of dreams in the fire's warmth. Yet as the shadows change shape, something archaic awakens. Stállo, the lurking chaos. A being between troll and human, sometimes clumsy and at others menacing. The children giggle, outsmarting him as in the old tales. Still, Stállo reminds us that light and darkness are related. The night deepens, the shadows stretch, enveloping the lávvu in serenity. The child – also, the inner child or the one envisioned – slips into dreams, guided by the flickering fire and navigating the space between play and myth, light and the unknown.



One always gives **offer** to the elements and nature spirits and gods and goddesses in a lávvu. It is good sámi manners to offer the unseen participants a guksi cup of hot coffee. To invite everybody into the circle and share. Before closing the circle we pour the leftover coffee grain on the fire to bless the fire with delicate and delicious coffee prepared with a lot of love and care. Pouring used coffee grounds onto the fire becomes an exchange between elements: what is shared lingers in the rhythms of nature, communion, and soul.



Andersson Martti, Å., Mazzi, E., & Sirniö, J. The Gåffestallan methodology. *L'uomo Nero. Materiali Per Una Storia Delle Arti Della Modernità*, 22(22-24), 343–373.

https://doi.org/10.54103/2974-6620/uon.n22-24_2025_pp343-373

Issue

[Vol. 22 No. 22-24 \(2025\): L'uomo nero green](#)

Section

Monographic Section

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