Artist Statement:

In the spring of 2021, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, I mostly stayed at home. The things I needed were delivered to me, arriving in cardboard boxes emblazoned with fat curved black arrows, filled and packaged by Amazon workers laboring in cavernous warehouses. I’d heard about how the company penalized workers for taking long bathroom breaks, and since the bathrooms tended to be far away, they would often have to urinate in cups that they would dump out after their shifts were over. Workers felt they were being treated as ‘disposable’. In March 2021, Amazon workers in Alabama tried to unionize. The company deployed anti-union tactics, posting propaganda in the bathrooms. The union vote failed. My boxes continued to arrive.

For several years, Alyssa and I pondered over the Museum of World Culture’s archives. We were interested not only in its contents, but in the physical structure of its storage system, how the artifacts are arranged on long rows of open shelves, and within tall stacks of thin metal drawers. Objects tagged with numerical labels, sitting in storage rooms not so dissimilar to Amazon’s own warehouses. Objects, hidden from public view, forced into unseen hierarchies that are nonetheless very palpable and present. Objects of colonialism, gained at the expense of other human beings’ lives.

When I conduct an online search for Erland Nordenskiöld’s work in the Amazon, books sold through Amazon appear at the top of my search results. The sculptures in this Involuntary Catalogue were made using scraps salvaged from this company’s packaging materials, shipped to my home in Maine during the pandemic.

Selena Kimball