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## **Northern Forest Memories**

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#9

Edited by Glen Coutts & Timo Jokela

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# Preface

*Glen Coutts and Timo Jokela*



**P**ublished annually since 2014, the *Relate North* series is published as part of the work of the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) group, one of the thematic networks of the University of the Arctic. The *Relate North* books are normally a direct result of the preceding year's *Relate North* symposium and exhibition and are based on the theme of that year's *Relate North* events. This book is different. The contents were selected from those submitted after a general, rather than a thematic, call for contributions.

In November 2021, the ninth *Relate North* symposium and exhibition was held in virtual format at the National Research Tomsk State University, Russia and, as usual, it attracted leading scholars, artists, designers and educators from around the circumpolar regions and beyond. It was the second time that a Russian University hosted *Relate North* (the first being in November 2019 at Pitirim Sorokin Syktyvkar University) and the first, due to the global COVID 19 pandemic to be held virtually. However, the events of 24 February 2022 in Ukraine obliged us to think again about the theme, call and contents of this book because many of the potential contributors would have been from different parts of the Russian federation. It is with great regret that we took the decision to put the *Everyday Extremes* theme on hold and decided to make a new, open-ended, call to the partners in the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) thematic network and beyond. It is our sincere hope that we will return to the excellent theme of *Everyday Extremes* at some point in the future.

It seems to us fitting that this book broke with the norm for the *Relate North* series in not having a thematic title. Rather, we have the somewhat sombre numerical title of *Relate North #9*. We deplore, and remain deeply concerned at the horrific events taking place in Ukraine; events many in Europe and around the world, thought consigned to the history books. We hope we speak for all professionals in our field when we say that we stand in solidarity with all artist-educators, designers and makers from all countries around the world, including those in Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The ASAD community will continue to work for a strong, northern, international community that

celebrates collaboration and inclusion that will, in the long term, create better environments and living conditions for people in all countries.

This is the ninth book in the series. Each volume explores matters concerning contemporary art, design, education and visual culture in the Arctic, the circumpolar north and the ‘near Arctic’ northern countries. We made a general call for contributions, chapters or visual essays, for a publication with the working title of *Relate North #9*. Essentially, we sought key texts and visual essays on matters of interest and concern in the north for this open-access publication. In the call for proposals, it was explained that the notions of art, education and design in the north might be broadly interpreted but should focus primarily on the visual. We further noted that the term ‘art’ should be viewed as embracing crafts, Indigenous making, design, media and product or service design. In addition, we suggested that authors might reflect on some issues or questions, for example:

- Matters of concern in the north through the lens of art and design theory and practice.
- How might art or design processes respond to some of the challenges facing those living in northern and Arctic areas today?
- What role might art play in documenting and communicating issues important to people in the north?
- What might be the educational role of art and design?
- How might the visual arts and design represent a northern sense of place??

In a book with such a nondescript numerical title, a reader might expect to find a diverse and perhaps eclectic collection of essay and reports. We hope that readers will not be disappointed and will view the expansive nature of the content as both a strength and a celebration of the vibrant state of art and design in different areas of the Arctic and circumpolar north in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As part of a series published by the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) we seek to advance discussion and debate using examples of practice-based research and reports of praxis. These are timely accounts of engagement with art and design practice in the north and the Arctic.

In the opening chapter, O’Grady and Ball from Dawson City, Yukon, Canada, present a fascinating insight into the work of artists working in the public arena. Art that comments on and navigates the delicate political and diplomatic territory of ‘ownership’, heritage and preservation. Whose heritage and what should be preserved and therefore given ‘status’? Crucial questions, deftly explored; boom, bust and steam indeed.

Modeen, based in Dundee, Scotland, in the second chapter, discusses the wide ranging and multifaceted issues of Northern Wetlands. Environmental, ecological and political dimensions are all touched on as Modeen explores wetlands in Scotland and Norway. The chapter presents a richly illustrated account of artists' work, artists with concerns for the environment and the fragile ecology of these endangered areas.

The third chapter is also from a Scottish academic. Through the medium of photography, Wall explores the notion of photography as a 'more than human practice' and as a way of 'creative caring' in a more than human world. A posthumanist stance, that sets out lines of inquiry that provoke and prod at our understandings of the world and what it means to be human in a more than human landscape. An ongoing investigation with photography as the principal medium of investigation.

For the fourth chapter we travel from Scotland, a short trip across the North Sea to Norway. Stoll, Gårdvik and Sørmo report on events; spring or summer schools, that brought together doctoral and masters students from several northern and Arctic countries and different disciplines. The eponymous title of the schools 'Living in the Landscape' explains the general purpose of the schools; to conduct culturally sensitive inquiry on sociocultural matters concerning life in the Arctic and subarctic landscape.

In a neighbouring Nordic country, Huhmarniemi and Joy, from Finnish Lapland, also investigate the Arctic landscape through encounters with forests and trees. The fifth chapter explores the notion that participating in arts activities can have beneficial effects on health and well-being. Part of a larger project that explored ecosystem services (forests) and their potential to work with the creative industries, Huhmarniemi and Joy report on a workshop entitled 'encountering trees and stones'.

Also in Finnish Lapland, Soppela, an animal biologist, reports in chapter six, on the connections between human and animal. Specifically, she reports on a particular breed of cattle known as the Lapland Cow and the relationship with its keeper. Using an arts-based approach to the investigation the author prepared an installation based on her previous ethnobiological research that explored the breed's fragile situation in Lapland today.

With some similarities in approach and content, chapter seven by Korsström-Magga and Jokela concerns an exploration of the everyday life of Sámi reindeer herders. Using photography as one of the main methods of documentation and collecting information, the study took place over five years. Five families took part by documenting aspects of their daily life which resulted in an installation and this ongoing study may result in a book.

In the concluding chapter, Kravtsov and Hökert report on a project that set out to investigate the potential of art and creative practice to the very important tourism industry in northern Finland. The essay outlines the background to a pilot workshop 'Northern Forest Memories' that used clay and natural materials to focus on encouraging communication with nature and at the same time provide the tourist with a memento of the experience.

As editors, we hope this book will be of interest to all those concerned with northern issues relating to art, design and education in addition to students and scholars of Arctic matters. The ASAD network has 28 member institutions across the circumpolar north and this publication will be used as core reading in several undergraduate and postgraduate courses in many of those universities and colleges.

Editing a book is collaborative work in itself and, as editors, we have been extremely fortunate to have the support of a remarkable group of people, without whom the book would not have reached publication. We therefore want to express our sincere thanks to the authors, artists, researchers and designers that have made this book possible. Our thanks are also due to the many academic reviewers and Board of *InSEA publications*. A special debt of gratitude is due to our designer Annika Hanhivaara, her patient professionalism in response to our many questions is very much appreciated.

*Glen Coutts and Timo Jokela*

Elderslie and Rovaniemi, November 2022

Visit the website for more information about ASAD or to download previous books in the *Relate North* series: **[www.asadnetwork.org](http://www.asadnetwork.org)**

For more information and open-access publications visit the publisher's website at: **[www.insea.org](http://www.insea.org)**





# Boom, Bust, Steam: A Public Art Response to a Problematic Monument

*Aubyn O'Grady (1,2) and Amy Ball (1)*

- 1) Local Field School, Dawson City, Yukon, Canada
- 2) Yukon School of Visual Arts, Dawson City, Yukon, Canada



In January of 2009, a group of artists held a wake for Martin Kippenberger's METRO-Net station in Dawson City, Yukon, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Territory. The mourners gathered indoors, adjacent to the site that had once hosted a portal which "disappeared into the netherworld" (Stankievech, 2009, n.p.). A few months earlier at the time of its disappearance, the station was in disrepair; it had been in place since 1995. The entrance had been dug into the ground, scraping the permafrost, and had walls made with thick local spruce logs. A wooden stairway led visitors down to a pair of wooden doors that were chained shut. The hand-carved doors were emblazoned with the emblem of the *Lord Jim Lodge*; understood by some to be a fraternal secret society, to others an artist collective that excluded female membership. The emblem presented as a hammer surrounded by a sun with a large pair of breasts hanging from the bottom. Below the emblem were the letters NHN, an acronym for NOBODY HELPS NOBODY, the *Lord Jim Lodge* motto (Hurtig, 2021). Over the years the doors were pried open by curious locals, children climbed on the spruce beams, and tourists got turned around at the doors, confused by the lock.

Metro-Net was conceived by Kippenberger as a metaphorical teleportation device for members of The Lord Jim Lodge to visit one another. Other sites of the METRO-Net network were located on the Greek Island of Syros and at the Messepark in Leipzig Germany, and still other iterations of the project cropped up after Kippenberger's death, including at the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003. The METRO-Net station in Dawson City was designed and constructed by Reinhold Nohal within the bounds of his Bunkhouse Hostel property, just off the town's main street. Nohal, a part time resident of the community, was an architect and a long-time friend of the artist.

The wake was precipitated by the sale of the METRO-Net station to an American collector, just as the spruce walls had begun buckling. In a performance called *Last Train*, artist Charles Stankievech projected the sounds of metro stations from around the world out of the vacant subterranean space as the station was dismantled. Among other events in the wake, Mayor John Steins gave a performance "beatifying"





**Figure 1.** Martin Kippenberger's Metro-Net entrance in Dawson City, Yukon.  
Photograph: Dawson City Museum, 1995.

Martin Kippenberger as Dawson City's *Patron Saint of the Arts*. The station, the idea, the network was declared "dead" by Stankievech, referring to the importance of the site on which the station was built (Stankievech, personal communication, April 7, 2022). Even if the dismantled station was reassembled down to the last piece of sod elsewhere, it would no longer be the same work. Despite some of the questions of publicness, namely the question of who this work is for, the *place* of it is as essential as the physical material of it.

## Site

In Dawson City, Yukon, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Territory, light waivers between 24 hours a day during the short summers and barely a glance of sunlight in December when the sun is hidden behind the old mountains that surround the town. Locals gamble on when the river will break up each spring (the "Ice Pool") and enjoy summer dips in a remediated tailing pond donated by a local mining family. It is a place where two differing worldviews meet and govern on territory recently negotiated through a modern treaty. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in culture, values, and traditional laws coexist with a settler colonial economy that is largely based on gold placer mining. Food that is not grown, foraged, or hunted is trucked in via the single highway heading north off the Alaska Highway. Waste is buried or trucked out. And, despite it lasting only a couple of years, the enormous impact of the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush and its aftermath are still dominant in the material heritage of the town. The historic town site has effectively been preserved to look as it did over a century ago; wooden boardwalks are lined with the saloon doors of businesses named *Pan of Gold* and the *Eldorado* adorned with hand painted signs. This aesthetic is maintained by the City of Dawson's strict heritage building guidelines.

Dawson City is often celebrated as an artist hub; an oft-quoted statistic is that there are more artists here per capita than anywhere else in Canada. There are many local folk theories about what draws arts-types to the area, ranging from the long winters ("what else is there to do?") or the alleged concentration of quartz crystal veins located beneath this territory, lending creative energy to the humans above. Undeniably, as both these theories suggest, this place, its extreme wavering between light and dark, and the vast landscape, influences its inhabitants. Dawson City as a cultural hub and creative centre is a well-earned designation. The Dawson City Arts Society was founded in 1998, which soon after established the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture (KIAC), the Yukon School of Visual Arts (YSOVA), the ODD Contemporary Art Gallery, and the Macaulay House Artist Residency (AiR), as well as numerous other festivals and infrastructures that support a vibrant local arts economy. The development of the "arts industry" in Dawson is well chronicled in KIAC Artist-in-Residence Zachary Gough's artist talk *Art Boom* (2013). Most of these arts institutions were established in the 1990s and early 2000s to introduce an arts-based economy that could stabilise the boom-and-bust cycles of mining; to this extent, they were successful in making Dawson City an arts and culture destination. However, the history of creative expression in this section of the Yukon River valley runs much deeper.

## Land as Monument

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in society is born out of the landscape it occupies (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government, 2020). The Hän Nation, whom modern Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens are descendants of, were known for their creative expression and hospitality. Hän citizens would perform songs and dances for other First Nations around the Yukon and Alaska; they were once known as the most powerful singers and dancers in the territory, even given the nickname of “crazy dancers” (Parsons, 2021, p. 2022).

Forms of creative expression for the Hän were tied up in utility; everything had to be carried as they travelled between areas of seasonal bounty for fishing, berry picking, and hunting. Possessions had to be light and transportable and were made of moose or caribou hide and small pieces of wood and bone (Kampen, 2012, p. 11). Material determined patterns, seen in the rows of triangles found on clothing that followed how porcupine quills lay. Early images and symbols that decorated the belongings signalled reverence, bounty, and convergence. A “T” found engraved on important tools from the *before times* is thought to represent the confluence of a river, an important fishing area (Parsons, 2022). Because the objects were small and useful and made of natural materials, “the Earth curates” what gets left behind, and there are few remaining belongings from the *before times* (S. Parsons, personal communication, March 16, 2022). The lack of sustaining belongings (such as the totem poles of the coastal Haida), means that contemporarily, there is not a distinctly recognized Athabaskan style or artform (Kampen, 2012).

In *We are Denezhu: A Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Declaration of Identity*, land is described as a life force: “[o]ur land lives and breathes. It is alive with power...Our beliefs, thoughts, and actions are responses to the land itself and in return the land provides for us. We work together to maintain this reciprocal relationship” (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government, 2020, p.3). Parsons (2021; 2022) makes the argument that the artistic legacy of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in is a life lived on the land for thousands of years without a trace. The absence of a landscape altered by humans, or landscape altered with non-humans in mind, is itself a creative expression. As an alternative to the monument, but not the monumental, Parsons presents the return of the 40 Mile caribou herd and the ensuing relationship that Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens are now rebuilding with the herd. This inter-species reconciliation, a hybrid of old and new knowledge, is a practice of creativity, one that counters non-Indigenous frameworks of creation. This relationship has informed our understanding of how *land is monument* on Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory.

## Dawson City as Monument

In stark contrast to *land as monument*, the municipal townsite of Dawson City is a very intentional monument to the human, and a distinctly different approach to “heritage”. In the 1950s Dawson began to reconfigure the economic engine of the region using vestiges of the town’s infamous connection to the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 through tourism (Doiron, 2001). The shift to heritage preservation was antedated by the various nation-making projects of the Canadian government post World War II. This included the establishment of government sanctioned, church- run residential schools, wherein First Nations children were taken from their families and communities to participate in a “civilising” program that forbid them from speaking their language or practising their culture. Canadian state attempts to “modernise” the Hän resulted in a disastrous and painful set of enforced separations; between generations, from the land, and thus their culture and history (Neufeld, 2018).

Constructed as a literal line of defence, the Alaska Highway is thought to be a more destructive settler colonial event than the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 (Cruikshank, 1985). Before the highway’s construction, which began in 1942, there were few roads in Yukon, and travel occurred by boat, on horseback, by foot, on snowshoes, and by sled (Castillo et. al., 2020). Much of the highway exists on those old trails used by First Nations to travel by foot or by dog team (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2022, n.p.). With the arrival of the American soldiers tasked with the hyper-speed construction of the highway, came new diseases, alcohol in abundance, and implicit danger for First Nations women along its route. Through the process of forced settlement, the highway severed traditional First Nations social ties, disrupted traditional harvesting and hunting practices, and drew trappers away from their traplines (Castillo et. al. 2020; Cruikshank, 1985; Yukon Indian People, 1973). The subsequent construction of the Klondike Highway (connecting Dawson & Whitehorse) shifted the major route of transportation from the river systems to the roads, effectively cutting off traders and other First Nations who had set up trade camps along the river. A government initiative to expand road networks for exploration and development in the 1950s and 1960s led to more mines and inevitably, more towns. The increased government presence also established a relentless northern bureaucracy to survey, assess, manage, and allocate lands, resources, and, of course, people (Cruikshank, 1985; Neufeld, 2018).

Dawson in the 1950s was experiencing a *bust* time: large-scale mining operations in the region had ceased, and the designation of territorial capital was transferred to Whitehorse in 1953 which continues to be the leading commercial centre of the Yukon

(Doiron, 2001). The curious practice of locals dressing up in period costume to welcome tourists had stopped when the tourist steamships were pulled from the water. A modest tourism market operated by the newly established Klondike Visitors Association was dedicated to adventurous tourists seeking to experience the Midnight Sun (these tourists were known colloquially as ‘sunners’) (A. Sommerville, personal correspondence, November 9, 2021). Nationally, a grand narrative was being crafted, one that promoted Canada as a *modern industrial nation*. The North was a prime site to support this narrative, and Dawson, the site of the Klondike Gold Rush, told the story of the evolution of the modern mining method and the establishment and growth of government administration (Neufeld, 2016). In 1959 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (the national board charged with identifying sites, individuals and events for national commemoration) recognized the national significance of Dawson City and its goldfields (Neufeld, 2018; Doiron, 2001).

Resulting from an investment from the Department of Northern Affairs, the Dawson City Gold Rush Festival was hastily organised and held in 1962. It was successful in bringing nearly 20,000 visitors to Dawson that year, but more significantly, prompted the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to initiate an evaluation of Dawson’s historic buildings. A few years later a formal decision was made to fund the national commemorative program in Dawson to form the *Klondike Historic Site Complex* (Doiron, 2001). As a result, tens of millions of dollars were invested in the restoration of gold rush era buildings in Dawson to commemorate “the achievements of the original settler colonisers and celebrated the concurrent development of northern natural resources by their successful descendants” (Neufeld, 2016, p.571). The establishment of Dawson City as the epicentre of gold rush action required a pioneer narrative of making home, which needed white men as founders. The absence of First Nation people is almost total. The Hän, not a significant contributor to the grand narrative, were rendered invisible in the past. Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) write,

Historically, Indigenous peoples have responded to this violence and negation through fierce and loving mobilization. Indigenous resistance and resurgence in response to the dispossessive forces of settler colonization, in both historical and current manifestations, employ measures and tactics designed to protect Indigenous territories and to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land through the practices and forms of knowledge that these practices continuously regenerate. (p. 254)

Despite this attempted erasure, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in remained resilient, as Neufeld writes: “[o]ver the course of a half century Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in stubbornly maintained

their distance, persistently forwarding their forms of identity and working to incorporate the newcomers into their own understanding the world. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in experiences provide an insight into how a heritage 'outside' can alter understandings and make a new inside heritage that accommodates difference without erasure" (Neufeld, 2018, p. 118).

In recent years, the local branch of Parks Canada, the caretakers of Klondike National Historic Site, have made an effort to change the way the site is animated, by working with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to create narratives aligned with the goals of Canada's *National Truth & Reconciliation Commission*. However, the *monument* of Dawson is still functional; the promotion and upkeep of a specific notion of *heritage* and history and the enduring colonial narrative of the gold rush influences what can be imagined here, what art is made here. As historian Ken Coates describes it, the gold rush is "a resilient, pliable myth" (1994, p. xxi). The built environment of Dawson provides what the authors consider to be a type of *settler permission*, to see the land as mediated through its colonial history, to see the land as something wild and separate from culture and community, to employ site to elevate an idea, and to imagine an audience elsewhere. It is this environment that *Local Field School* sought to interrupt.

## Local Field School

*Local Field School* (LFS) is an artist collective that was formed as an experimental educational project developed to encourage the sourcing/ foraging/ testing and sharing of art materials in and around Dawson City. Like many art + educational + projects, we use the framework of *school* to shape our idea of programming.

There already is an established post-secondary arts institution in Dawson City. The Yukon School of Visual Arts (YSOVA) offers a Foundation Year in Visual Arts for up to twenty students per cohort year. It is governed in partnership with the Dawson City Arts Society, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and Yukon University. While many of the collective members belonging to LFS are affiliated with YSOVA, it is a distinctly different project and is decidedly in opposition to many of the bureaucratic qualities of *school*. We aim for hyper-flexibility in our programming, and to operate timelessly, meaning that anyone at any time can engage with our projects. Instead of seeing limited access to materials as prohibitive, we re-frame material limits as *creative constraints*. Recognizing the scope and breadth of regional knowledge connected to this place, we aim to develop a model that can challenge conventional ideas of what rural/community/subarctic art, school, and sustainable practice *can be*.





**Figure 2.** Colour matching submission to Local Field School Session 1: Local Palette by Justin Apperley. Photograph: Local Field School, 2020.

LFS was established in the summer of 2020, a result of special funding made available by the Yukon Government to support projects that create community through art early in the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time our community was unvaccinated and we had many Elders and young people in our community to protect. For the first session of LFS we programmed three thematic units to encourage participants to make experimental work, forage outdoors and pay attention to the aesthetics of their everyday lives. For each unit a set of instructions was delivered in some novel way. The Sign of the Times unit asked participants to notice and document interesting local signage, which, because of Dawson's heritage guidelines, must be hand-painted. Participants then received instructions from a local graphic designer on how to make their own signs, considering message, lettering, and location. The Source Materials unit was developed to source as many local art materials as possible, we were particularly interested in paper making with local fibres, willow as sculpture material, and uses for local clay. The unit was introduced as an

advertisement placed in the Klondike Sun local newspaper, advertisement and included instructions on how to make paper pulp. Participants were instructed to form new paper out of the newspaper with the addition of local plant fibres such as fireweed, willow, and yarrow. In the Local Palette unit participants were mailed a variety of paint chip samples and were tasked with finding the exact colour match somewhere in their environment. They submitted photographs of the matches to LFS which were then posted to the project's social media accounts, creating a local palette (see Figure 2). Participants then recreated the colour (using whatever means possible) on a pre-addressed postcard which was mailed to another participant, connecting the LFS community through post.

For the second session of Local Field School in 2021, we decided to focus our energy on a single theme and to increase the project's boundaries in both size and scope. Through initial conversations about the lack of visible public art projects in Dawson, we landed on the creation of a collective public art project. Further, we wanted to develop a project-as-critique to the *monument* that we live in and create in; the historic townscape of Dawson City.

## Moments of Public Art In-and-Around Dawson City

We began the project with a survey of public art moments in Dawson City, looking for examples of public art projects that interact with the built or imagined environment. Throughout our inquiry, we asked the following questions such as who is the art for? Who does the art make sense for? How is the site accounted for? And finally, does the site change the meaning of the work?

In 1969, renowned American art critic Lucy Lippard, along with artists Iain and Elaine Baxter (N.E. THING Co.), Lawrence Weiner, and Harry Savage, travelled north of Dawson City to the settlement of Inuvik, Northwest Territories to conduct and witness in-situ art making "somewhere in the Arctic Circle" (Lippard, 1969, p. 665). Actions included creasing a rock with several shots of a .22 ("The Arctic Circle Shattered"), the insertion of a padlocked bolt into the northern part of a tree trunk ("Locked Up North"), and a sign staked on the land claiming, "You Are Now in the Middle of an N.E. Thing Co. Landscape" (Lippard, 1969, p. 668). This approach to artmaking is aligned with the practices of 1960s-70s conceptual artists and belongs to the paradigm of "Art-in-Public-Places" described by curator Miwon Kwon: "[w]hat legitimated them as "public" art was quite simply their siting outdoors or in locations deemed to be public primarily because of their "openness" and unrestricted physical access" (Kwon, 2002, p. 62). The particular



qualities of the site mattered only to the extent that they posed formal compositional challenges to the artists. Arguably, in the case of this expedition, site *did* matter, but its role was secondary, a novel geography to host artist concepts, as demonstrated by a work by Iain Baxter who sent a telegram reading, “this statement will be is being has been sent from inside to outside the Arctic Circle” (Lippard, 1969, p. 670). Recounting the trip, Lippard (1969) wrote “northern spaces are grand, bleak, infinite and reject autonomous man-made objects almost by definition” (p. 671). The actions of these artists in Inuvik demonstrate a pervasive theme and approach to non-Indigenous artmaking in the North. These projects consider the North as being on the periphery: a space void of artistic expression, or that is missing the right kind of creative expression.

Local Field School considers Kippenberger’s METRO-net installation to be conceptually aligned with the desire to convert abstract or derelict or peripheral sites into *authentic* and *unique* locales ripe for development and promotion, simply through the attentions of the artist (Kwon, 2002). Again, it could be argued that *site* ultimately *did* matter in Kippenberger’s installation, however, it only mattered when it disappeared. Only in its absence was the site given meaning. Kippenberger, along with many others, use *site* to broadcast the aims of their project, only considering the location as a host and not as a home.

There have been examples of impactful, albeit temporary, public arts projects that critically engage with the site and place in and around Dawson City. These projects are predominantly the result of the *Natural and Manufactured Residency* (2005-2018) overseen by the ODD Gallery, the contemporary art gallery housed (conceptually and physically) within the Klondike Institute for Arts and Culture. The *Natural and Manufactured Residency* invited two artists to Dawson each summer to engage with themes of cultural and economic values imposed on the environment, and to re-imagine and re-interpret the regional landscape and social infrastructure (KIAC, 2022). Works were created on site during a two-month residency, encouraging site-specific and land-based works. A memorable example is Brandon Vickerd’s *Northern Satellite* (2009) (Figure 3), a detailed exact-scale replica of a Lockheed Martin Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite constructed entirely from birch wood that was installed to look as though it had crash landed along the main street of Dawson City. By embedding a fallen satellite into the land Vickerd’s sculpture called attention to screens as mediators (referring to GPS, before the proliferation of smartphones) in the representations of landscape, what he called “the ultimate clash between experiencing the natural world versus a manufactured experience” (KIAC, 2009, n.p.).



**Figure 3.** Local students interacting with Northern Satellite by Brandon Vickerd.  
Photograph: KIAC, 2009.

Badgett and Stratman's installation (2011), *Augural Pair*, part of the 2011 Natural and Manufactured Residency, took the form of two viewing stations with magnifying spotting scopes that focussed on two discrete constructions. The first site was an electronic sign posted above the Dawson City bank which displayed up-to-the-minute pricing of gold. The second site was on a forested ridge across the Yukon River

from Dawson City, where the pair had placed a large, mirrored disc reflecting the sky, accompanied by hand-carved ravens (curious local ravens observed the installation from nearby rocks and branches) (Figure 4). The two sites/sights investigated how value and desire are connected to landscape and resource extraction; “these two works suggest a connection between international commodities exchange and natural splendour...witnessed through the mediated viewpoint of the lens, these works literally bring into focus the things we might desire but can’t ultimately reach” (ODD Gallery, 2011, p.3).

The *moments* of public art we described are representative of the approaches conceptual artists take in interacting with, encountering, and in some cases ignoring, site in their artworks. LFS’s next collective inquiry focused on what we considered to be a/our *public*. We owe a great deal of our thinking about the concept of *public* to a con-



**Figure 4.** Detail of the *Augural Pair* riverside installation by Deborah Stratman and Steve Badgett. Photograph: KIAC, 2011.

versation between artists Krzysztof Wodiczko and Malkit Shoshan (2022), particularly around their notions of *belonging* to a public and to our agency as artists to make work as an *intervention* in/ to a public. Referring to relationships with power and relationships with other beings, Shoshan asks “[w]hat is our agency to construct and modify these relationships?” (2022, p. 122). We know that artist-community collaborations have the potential to “reoccupy lost cultural spaces and propose historical counter-memories” (Kwon, 2012, p. 238). However, quoting Hal Foster (1986) curator Miwon Kwon warns that “the quasi-anthropological role set up for the artist can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority” (Kwon, 2002, p. 138). This warning, again, invokes and questions our authority as a non-Indigenous collective of artists to create within a built site that promotes a very narrow form of public (reflective of the desire of the nation-state). However, the desire to make a public space more inclusive is where Wodiczko (2022) says that artists can help; to facilitate the recognition of many *different publics*, to create new situations in the frictional space between publics, to activate, and to engage in public discourse.

## Steam Boat

In conversations circling around who Local Field School’s public is/was, we decided to make a work *for* the public. In pursuing this form, we decided our public then consisted of our immediate community, *those who we winter with*. We decided to create a site that would bring people together in wellness and celebration, without exclusion, and without site permanence. What came from this project was a mobile *interruption* into the monument to the gold rush that we live in, rather than a static intervention.

At this time, we were also presented with a sailboat as a possible sculpture material. The sailboat arrived with its own regional lore; its original purpose was to deliver its previous caretaker from the small community of Mayo, Yukon back to England; a journey that would require sailing down the Yukon River to the Bering Sea, and then further northward through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. With the expertise and skills of local builder-designer Jared Klok, Local Field School decided to turn the sailboat into a mobile community sauna. Despite the length and intensity of the winter season, there is a surprising lack of sauna culture in Dawson City, and there are no public saunas in the town to date.

Once the project was confirmed, a building site was secured, and we began work on converting the sailboat into the *Steam Boat*. A crew of dedicated volunteers partici-





**Figure 5.** Participants in Local Field School's "Sauna School". Photograph: Local Field School, 2021.

pated in weekly *Sauna School* sessions, helping to put together all aspects of the sauna: the building, scraping, sanding, painting, shingling, and framing of the vessel. It also included gathering birch branches to make *vihtas*, and sourcing for volcanic rocks (unusual in our highly sedimentary landscape), and foraging Labrador tea, juniper, spruce, and other floral elements to be included in the steam. We salvaged what we could for the building materials, including sheets of iconic bubbled pressed tin from a derelict gold rush shack on a collective member's property. The result of this labour is a mobile sauna vessel lined and shingled with specially acquired cedar, that can comfortably seat up to six people, and that gives off a loving heat that warms to the core even at -34 Celsius.

## Conclusion

The proliferation of COVID-19 perpetually delayed the official ‘launch’ of the Steam Boat in our community. But, in April 2022, LFS towed the sauna to the former site of the Kippenberger METRO-Net installation, now a parking lot for the Dawson City Bunkhouse. We held an intimate sauna session with members who helped to construct the project. The return of a public artwork to the site was an intentional response to the exclusive legacy of the now-disappeared Kippenberger, countered by the inclusive and temporary nature of the Steam Boat. LFS landed on the idea of a community sauna as public art through a conversation about the lack of meaningful engagement with *site* in previous works of public art, and a desire to interrupt a problematic monument to the gold rush. While we are still at the beginning of our exploration into the pedagogical and collaborative possibilities our mobile public art site can produce, we look forward to hosting more sessions of Sauna School in our community, and to bringing together a diverse public in inclusion, celebration, and winter warmth.



**Figure 6.** *Steam Boat on the former site of Kippenberger’s METRO-Net in Dawson City, Yukon. Photograph: Local Field School, 2021.*

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# Northern Wetlands and Socially-Engaged, Environmental Artists

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**M**any artists desire to use their art as site-specific works to challenge, frame, or prompt environmental issues, encouraging viewers to appreciate a more critical awareness of the site's ecology. Aspects of features particular to wetlands weave through this illustrated essay, with the aim of showing diverse ways these artworks interact within their environment, and speculating on their aesthetic significance. This chapter focuses on Northern Wetlands—of Norway and Scotland, first and foremost, with an examination of the wetlands themselves, as well as the practices –and examples—from socially-engaged artists whose concern is the preservation and ecological attention paid to these wetlands, among other aesthetic and conceptual considerations. But in examining the importance of wetlands alongside artworks that have been sited in these remote places, there will be a brief discussion of other Northern Wetlands. These touch upon Arctic wetlands in Sweden and Finland which border the Norwegian lands. We begin the list with the Flow Country of Scotland, named after the Old Norse word 'floi' meaning 'wet' or 'marshy'. The Flow Country is the largest expanse of blanket bog in Europe, at around 200,000 hectares. This is followed by Ireland's historic raised peat bogs in its Midlands. 'Raised bogs' are often inconspicuous, with their raised, dome-shaped masses of peat occupying former lakes or shallow depressions in the landscape. They occur throughout the midlands of Ireland. Their principal supply of water and nutrients is from rainfall and the substrate is acidic peat soil, which can be up to 12m deep. (Global Distribution of Peatlands | GRID-Arendal, 2022) Other significant northern wetlands in the world would include the Yugansky Nature Reserve in Western Siberia, maintained as ecological 'forever wild' nature reserve; the Mer Bleue (blue sea) of Canada, with a large expanse of sphagnum bog situated in the ancient channel of the Ottawa River; and the Big Bog of northern Minnesota, the largest area of wetlands outside Alaska in North America, with nine and a half thousand acres of bog, among others internationally. (Global Distribution of Peatlands | GRID-Arendal, 2022)





**Figure 1.** *The Forgotten Town (1996), by Jan Håfström in collaboration with architect Johan Celsing. Sited near the village of Inndyr, Gildeskål, Norway. Photograph: Steinar Skaar & Knut Wold.*

Another famous country for wetlands is Norway, and it is here where we begin a sculpture walk. Just up the hill from Kjellingvatn Lake on Norway's upper Western coast, and along a gravel road, a walker might encounter the stone ruins of what seems like the remnants of a former village. Completed in 1996 by the Swedish artist Jan Håfström – in collaboration with the architect Johan Celsing --the permanent sited work was one of the 36 public sculptures installed in 35 out of Nordland's 46 municipalities. This is one of

the projects from Artscape Nordland, which was an international art scheme with invited commissioned artists from 18 different countries. Begun in 1992, it was completed in 1998. (Withers, 2018). (See Figure. 1)

Situated 30 meters above the lake, it evokes the feeling of emptiness, of a lost presence—and is, in fact, entitled *The Forgotten Town*. Is it the town that was forgotten, the human presence absent while the mountains, lakes and trees endure? In this stunningly beautiful setting, there are more questions than answers; one might wonder, is this like the uninhabited stone ruins of villages dotted about the Scottish Highlands, evidence of the Clearances by wealthy estate owners, which forced the tenants to be evicted from the lands they inhabited? Or, perhaps, are the neat and tidy stone wall fragments more like those found in the Greek islands, where inhabitants left when the potable water disappeared? What can this absence, evoked by the presence of laid stone, signify?

This community-sponsored project began through a public debate about the role of art in society.

The County of Nordland, with its 240,000 inhabitants, does not have an art museum - and people must travel long distances to study modern art in museums and galleries. The idea of a collection of modern art in Nordland, one sculpture in every municipality and with the landscape as gallery, was first presented in 1988... The underlying idea of the project is that a work of art creates a place of its own through its very presence in the landscape. The sculpture also visualises its surroundings, thus giving the place a new dimension. (Withers, 2018)

With the power of artworks to read powerfully, sites of the coastal regions of Artscape Nordland serve our purpose here of testing this contextualisation through nature, and specifically, allowing us to examine how art sited in various wetlands “read” in their concern about ecological conditions.

The separate areas of wetland conservation listed above exist on a global scale, and are hugely important for many reasons. Wetlands constitute a small proportion of land mass, and yet they account for a large percentage of global carbon containment, enough to substantially mitigate the effect of climate changes. Though they are seldom visited, they are home to a vast array of species, from plants to insects, birds and mammals. They purify water as the drainage from rainfall collects to standing water, and then effectively filters the water, passing through meters of plant roots and peat. And bogs help with a kind of natural water control, often preventing flooding or the worst effects of draught,



**Figure 2.** Alexander Maris (centre) explaining moorland plant species to artists Laura Hope (left) and Christine Baeumler (right), on Rannoch Moor. Photograph: Mary Modeen, 2018.

by moderating water levels. This is achieved through their sponge-like qualities, which absorb many times their original volume of water in periods of heavy rainfall, or maintain moisture in periods of drought, thus being simultaneously water providers, purifiers, and moderators. Other coastal wetland areas function as protection of the shores, and nurseries for many species of fish and birdlife. Hence, they are crucial to fisheries, birdlife, coastal protection, and agriculture. It is said colloquially that ‘a world without wetlands is a world without water.’

Wetlands have evolved in various ways that have allowed its flora and fauna to flourish in acidic soils and almost constant wet conditions. Darwin said: “Nothing exists for itself alone, but only in relation to other forms of life.” This was the prototypical understanding of ecosystems before that word was applied, but the same wisdom that lay behind observation and practice in Indigenous communities for centuries, the world over. Bogs are a case in point. The species in boglands might typically contain in these northern climates bog cotton, sphagnum moss, blueberries, wild cranberries, bog or-

chids, and carnivorous plants like pitcher plants and sundews. These latter surprising examples are due to the fact that the nutrient range is not rich in boglands. Tamarack, ramshead ladyslippers, lichens, brackens, star moss, and slow-growing miniaturised conifers add to the diversity of plant life. In the photograph below, Scottish artist Alexander Maris—a longtime resident of Kinloch Rannoch, explains the slow growth life cycles to other artists visiting Rannoch Moor in Scotland.

As evidence of other life forms in wetlands, to name but a few, are sandhill cranes and whooping cranes, osprey, great grey owls, waders such as the golden plover and the greenshank, sea eagles, and other life such as golden spiders, tortoises and frogs, wolves, moose, lynx and caribou, all of which inhabit various wetlands.

This abundance of life is not by chance. Indigenous peoples, scientists who study soil, biologists, artists and philosophers have come to link clay—soil—with the evolutionary emergence of life itself, of living organisms from inorganic matter. In poetic language, the philosopher Robert Harrison says:

...the first primitive cells with membranes containing RNA occurred within phyllosilicate clay minerals, which provided the basic platforms for the formation, growth and division of some of the earliest living cells on earth. 'In the beginning there was clay.' It was the labour of living organisms fighting every inch of the way that turned it into the soil of vital generousities. (Entitled Opinions, 24 March 2022.)

He continues in rapturous and almost euphoric language:

...human care in its self-transcending character is an expansive projection of the intrinsic ecstasy of life. What distinguishes life from unliving matter is the continuous self-exceeding by which it bursts forth from the lifeless, and ecstatically maintains itself in being through expenditures that increase rather than deplete the reserves of vitality. Life is an excess, an overflow. If I had to offer a definition of it, I would call it 'the self-ecstasy of matter.' (Harrison, 2022)

This 'ecstasy of matter' plays out over epochal time. And by human metrics, framed by measurements of human lifetimes, time plays out slowly in the growth patterns of northern wetland sites. Cold weather, short growing seasons, sparse nutrients in the acidic soil, and often, incessant wind make the plants grow slowly, and trees more than a century old can look like stunted bonsais. Footprint indentations of caribou tracks from a hundred years ago are still visible in the star moss and sphagnum. (Baeumler, 2014)





**Figure 3.** A Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*) adult foraging on the tide edge among seaweed at high tide, Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes Nature Reserve, Hampshire, UK, December. Photograph: Nick Upton (rspb-images.com).



**Figure 4.** RSPB Flows viewing tower on the Dubh Lochan trail, over blanket bog, RSPB Forsinard Nature Reserve, Flow Country, Northern Scotland, UK, October. Photograph: David Tipling (rspb-images.com).





**Figure 5.** *Hannah Imlach, Hazelwood Anemometer, commissioned by the Flows to the Future project, from her artist's residency in the Flow Country; made of tulipwood, brass and 3D printed components, 2018. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist; ©Hannah Imlach.*

What this means in practical terms is that the wetlands terrain is too fragile to withstand most human visitation (never mind the fact that most people are too reluctant to don waders to go out into difficult and uncertain terrain!). To visit a bog by tromping through is to leave great tracks of destruction. In Scotland's Flow Country, and Minnesota's Big Bog, wooden boardwalks have been constructed for visitors to see, but not sink into, the bogs. This is a start, and a way to catch glimpses of the richness and diversity—the vast expanses that exist in these marginal lands.

In Scotland's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) site at Forsinard (Figure. 4) in the Flow Country, visitors are able to explore the rare blanket bog here, one of the rarest habitats in the world. The RSPB looks after more than 21,000 hectares of it, and have been doing so for over 20 years.

Land managers and other organisations are cooperating to remove planted forest attempts at its outer edges, to block drains that were created to allow those plantations,

and to engage in the restoration of the wetlands. This attempt at restoration will, in time, allow the sphagnum mosses and wading birds to fully return, and for the species already there to flourish.

Artist Hannah Imlach's work, above, was completed on commission for the Peatland Partnership, and sited in the Flow Country wetlands of northern Scotland. She is an artist-researcher who is investigating in what ways artworks can embody the knowledge and circumstances of current environmental issues. Some of the resulting work (fieldwork) merges the findings from conservation and ecological restoration with art, often siting work *in situ*, and leading to a more reflective understanding of various species' absence and presence. In the work above, the anemometer and the swifts in the background are two examples of movement in the unquiet landscape, in motion with wind, thermals and patterns of sun and cloud. Sometimes, photographs often give the appearance of stasis, but embodied experience on these sites show the constant states of change and flux. Imlach is an artist working predominantly in sculpture and photography. Her transient and site-specific works respond to particular ecologies, exploring sites of environmental conservation and renewable energy transition. She is a practice research PhD candidate within Human Geography at the University of Edinburgh, exploring the potential for site-specific sculpture within the context of the RSPB Loch Lomond nature reserve. A video demonstrates her work in the field in the far northlands of Scotland (Imlach, 2018).

## Types of Wetlands and 'Ramsar'

At this point, we should clarify that there are several different types of wetlands.

Norway, for example, has a wide variety of wetland types. Their coastal line is more than 71,000 km long and includes both fiords and islands, which naturally results in that many of these sites are categorised as 'coastal'.

The other types of wetlands which will be described here below and in some detail include moorlands (mires/myres); coastal cliffs; island wetlands; marshes and bogs, also with the distinctive raised bogs and blanket bogs; mangroves; estuaries; and tidal deltas.

The '**Convention on Wetlands**' is the worldwide inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and their resources, worldwide. The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Hence, the shorthand appropriation of the term 'Ramsar' is a signification of the historical reference to this Convention of 1971, and its dedicated attention to wetlands.

Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's geographic regions, have consented to become "Contracting Parties".

The Convention's mission is 'the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world'. (As quoted in the Ramsar.org website, and agreed at the COP12 convention, as Wetlands of International Importance, and hence, called 'Ramsar sites').

The Ramsar wetland sites include nature types such as islands and archipelagos, tidal flats, bird cliffs, fiords, inland lakes, mires, moors, river deltas, inland deltas.

In designating important wetland sites and listing them as agreed Ramsar sites, each participant nation in this UN Convention has identified the areas that they recognise as essential for breeding grounds, water purification and flood control.<sup>1</sup> Bird cliffs are also important in Norway's Ramsar sites, and include protection for the steep rock faces upon which pelagic sea birds nest.

## Where Might One Find These Northern Wetlands?

Norway presently has 63 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with a combined surface area of 887,903 hectares. Most of these are located on the mainland, while nine are located in the high arctic in the Svalbard archipelago. All designated Ramsar sites across the world are protected by international law.<sup>2</sup>

Luciano Fabro's artwork *Nest* (Figure 6), has the quality of both surprise (the unexpected element of human intervention on so remote an island), and the sense of a protective space for birds' eggs to rest safely. The marble columns, classical structures associated with temples, are in sections, dismantled from any architectural purpose and evocative of past time. And the marble bird eggs, nestled between the segments, prompt the thought that the survival and endurance of birds outlasts the manmade structures of reverence.

In Scotland, as in Norway, several protected areas are located on cliff sites. Bird cliffs are found in coastal areas in the North Atlantic and Arctic. The sites have steep natural formations, such as ledges and small cavities in the stone. The Bullers of Buchan is one such site, on the northeast coast of Scotland. It is a collapsed sea cave on the edge of the North Sea, and forms a deep circular well (or "pot"). All along the inner walls are to be found a host of nesting sea birds, including kittiwake, puffins, fulmars, gannets, and guillemots. The cliffs illustrated below are also in Aberdeenshire, and home to many seabirds.



**Figure 6.** Luciano Fabro (1936-2007), *Nest*, (1994). Marble. Photograph: Vegar Moen. Sited on the island of Vedøy, Norway. It is a piece “made for the birds” according to Fabro- and its placement on the island is a place where seabirds nest.

**Figure 7.** Herring gull pair and guillemots on breeding ledges, RSPB Fowlsheugh Nature Reserve, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, UK. May. Photograph: Genevieve Leaper (rspb-images.com).

These and other cliff sites provide the necessary protection for nesting for pelagic sea birds, usually close to the birds' feeding grounds. After foraging in the ocean, the birds bring both food and subsequently, nutrients, to the bird cliffs and surrounding area by the spreading of guano, which provides nutrient-rich growing conditions generating the diverse vegetation often to be found on these sorts of islands and cliffs. Large colonies of nationally endangered and vulnerable bird species such as Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), and Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) breed in these sites.

Another important wetland type in both Norway and Scotland are mires (or moors), often consisting of a mixture of wetter and dryer areas making the sites valuable for water birds like ducks and waders, and resting places for migratory birds such as various types of geese. The site in which Imlach's fieldwork is shown demonstrate these features (Imlach, 2018). Examples of Ramsar sites containing mires in Norway are located at Kvisleflået, Atnsjømyrene, Fokstummyra, the Hedmarksvidda wetland system.

Deltas form another significant wetland type. The largest inland delta in Norway is Nordre Øyeren in southern Norway. The site includes low-lying islands and land giving way to Lake Øyeren, which is an important area for resting migratory waterbirds and also holds the greatest diversity of fish species in Norwegian freshwaters. In many ways these are comparable to some of the Hebridean islands off the west coast of Scotland, where similar bird colonies and habitats for migrating birds abound.

## Why are Wetlands Disregarded or Undervalued?

Artists, perhaps better than most people, know the consequences that occur when things are not seen: when these things are not in the public eye, they are disregarded or completely devalued. Places where one must not tread, unpeopled, remote, and 'undeveloped', wetlands have been too often dismissed as 'empty' and 'wasteland.'

We see now, in Ramsar-designated sites of importance and protection, and through eyes searching for ways to mitigate the environmental damage that has already been done, and have come to know the true value in wetlands. But this has not always been the case. Even in Scotland's Flow Country, in the 1980s, there was debate in local councils and land management groups over whether to develop them—that is, to drain the moorlands—for private forestry projects, planting with quick-growing Sitka spruce, in place of these 'wet deserts'. On a visit to one bog, one councilman surveyed the land and





**Figure 8.** Blanket bogs pool in Flow Country. Photograph: Niall Benvie (rspb-images.com)

said, “Well it’s MAMBA country isn’t it? *Miles and miles of bugger-all!*” (Must Love Bogs | Sami Emory, 2021)

Not only does the soggy peat hold carbon, but so do plants such as sphagnum, sedges and heather, which have the same effect as sponges, absorbing many times their volume in water retention capacity, as well as sequestering carbon dioxide.

The converse of this reasoning then, means that making visible and known the value of these wetlands has the effect of helping them to rise in the esteem of the general

public. When their value is seen in terms of biodiversity, of carbon sequestration, flood and water table control, purification of water, and erosion prevention, as nurseries for fish and birds, as well as natural habitats for thousands of species—then they do not feel like wastelands any longer. And artists can make visible some of these places of ‘special significance’, or represent them in various ways, which brings even more attention. In this sense, public art commissions in general, and the *Artscape Nordland* project specifically, may be seen to have been a success, in that it has drawn visitors by the thousands to these remote wetland municipalities.

Here is a case of work *in situ* that builds inextricably upon its sited placement. In these three images of the work *Untitled* by Per Barclay, two ‘boathouse’ types of structures made of metallic frames have been placed in the water’s edge, and strategically seem to be sinking into the water. Atop both of them, massively heavy stone, as if relocated from a quarry, weigh them down, seeming to push the structures even more deeply into the water. The stones are horizontal, and visibly parallel to the water in the lake, simulating the feel of heavy snow and ice, pressing down upon the land. The invocation of the pull of gravity is eloquent here, holding down the insubstantial human-made structure, empty in its presence, emphasising the weight of nature, which is overwhelming.

In his book *We’re Doomed. Now What?: Essays on War and Climate Change*, and quoted by artist–collaborators Hjorth and Ikonen, author Roy Scranton writes,

We need to learn to see not just with Western eyes but with Islamic eyes and Inuit eyes, not just with human eyes but with golden-cheeked warbler eyes, coho salmon eyes, and polar bear eyes, and not even just with eyes at all but with the wild, barely articulate being of clouds and seas and rocks and trees and stars. (Scranton, 2015)

The manner in which Scranton embraces multiplicity as the necessity for seeing widely and seeing truly is shared in the works of artists like Hjorth and Ikonen. To go one step further, Canadian scholar Fikret Berkes writes:

...the Dogrib Dene (Athapascan) notion of *ndé*, which could be translated as “ecosystem” except that *ndé* is based on the idea that everything in the environment has life and spirit (Legat et al, 1995). This makes it considerably different from mechanistic concepts of ecosystems...One of the major lines of inquiry in the field of traditional ecological knowledge concerns cosmologies



**Figures 9–11.** Per Barclay, *Untitled* (1993).  
Marble, aluminium, boathouse stone structure,  
120 x 300 x 40 cm. Three views, showing  
the work from a distance to include the  
environment in which it is set (Figure 9), and  
close-ups of the work (Figures 10 and 11).  
This work is part of the Artscape Nordland  
project, and is located at Fauske Museum.  
Photographs: courtesy of the artist Per Barca  
and OSL Contemporary.



and worldviews. Are traditional worldviews relevant to present-day resource stewardship, and to the examination of our current attitudes toward the environment? Our view of the world and the universe and how we relate to them is the source of our values... (Berkes, 2006, pp. 76-77.)

As if to illustrate this point, that one's worldview is the *source* of determining value and importance, the artists Hjorth and Ikonen created a visual response to geo-locational human identity, as determined in large part by the region and land people inhabit. In an article entitled *Eyes as Big as Plates: Nature and Identity*, writer Milly Burroughs suggests that in representing a national and even regional identity in Norway (and elsewhere, by extrapolation), there is an artistic combination of memory and nature in subtle and complexly interwoven ways, which combine the geo-location of a specific landscape, with a belief system. In this case as she reviews Hjorth and Ikonen's photographic collaboration, and she proposes that this combination of landscape, memory and a naturalistic belief, is written and rewritten over the course of a lifetime in a person's constructed identity. She writes:

...representations of regional identity in art are a gateway to education and allow organic expression to be reproduced around the world, with an audience already searching for emotional engagement. While Norwegian artists' undeniable love of nature is rooted in the preservation of national identity, the principles of Romantic Nationalism are now more relevant than ever in the context of creating a culturally informed and considerate global community. (Burroughs, 2022)

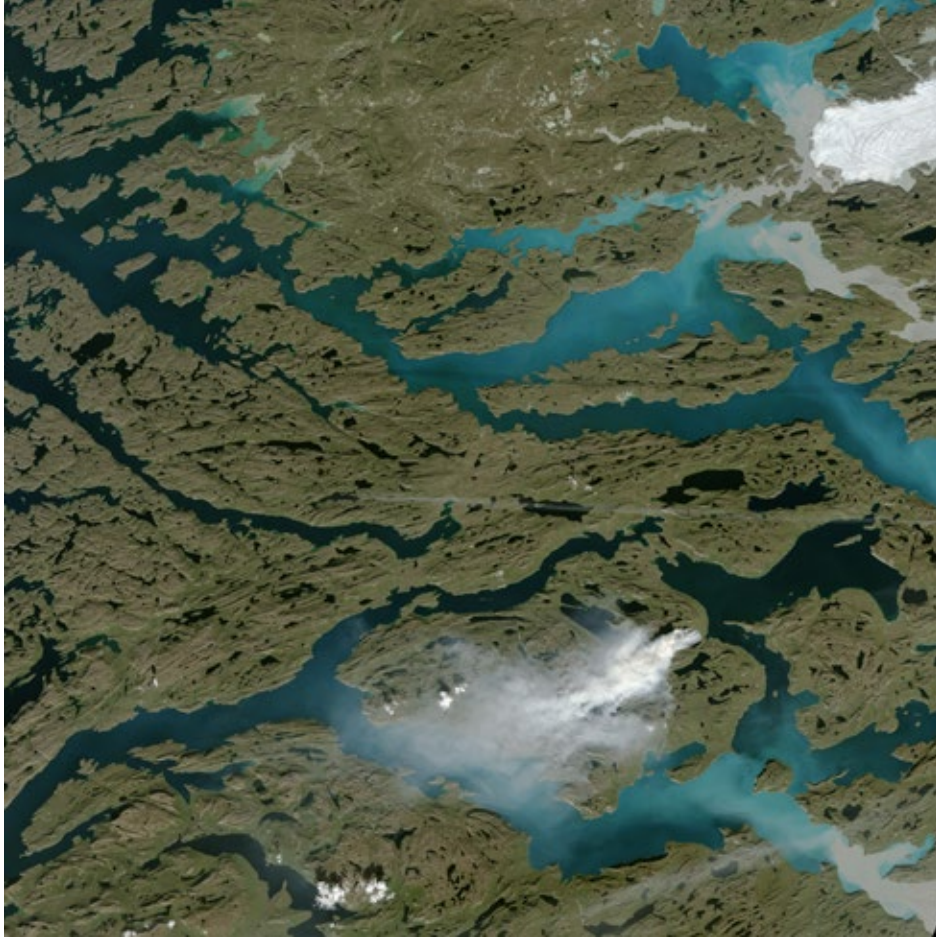
This remarkable photographic image in Figure 12, and others in the same suite, visibly merge the inhabitants and the land they inhabit. This serves to suggest by association that there is another role in the work of artists and environmental awareness, and that is to underscore the effects of making visible the process by which humans are not apart from "nature," but are intrinsically embedded in the land and its ecosystems. In the much-debated term 'Anthropocene', evidence of the human hand is everywhere. But less visible—and possibly every bit as important—is the effect of the belief systems *behind* the human actions; the ways in which identity is constructed as inherently embedded in, and a part of, the land, water, and air which sustains all life.



**Figure 12.** From *Eyes as Big as Plates*, Karoline Hjorth and Riitta Ikonen, *Agnes II* (Norway, 2011). Photograph: courtesy of the artists, ©Karoline Hjorth and Riitta Ikonen, 2011.

### **What are the Differences Between the Wetlands in Scotland and the Wetlands in Norway?**

Wetlands of the various types we have considered here (moors, marshes, shorelines, raised bogs, cliffs, etc.)—despite their name, can also suffer from drought. In fact, in Scotland, *NatureScot*, the country’s agency for nature, has been commissioning internship placements for young graduates to conduct, among other things, studies on monthly patterns of drought in an effort to predict which areas in the country might be most susceptible to drought in the next 20 years. (#YCW2020 A Day in the Life, Scotland’s Nature, 2020)



**Figure 13.** Peat fires in Greenland, NASA Earth Observatory image, by Jesse Allen, using Landsat data from the U.S. Geological Survey. © Jesse Allen. (Earth Observatory, n.d.)

In untouched bogs, the carbon held in the peat remains soggy and intact. But when a bog is dried out, (drained) for agriculture or other reasons, the carbon starts to oxidize and is released to the atmosphere as planet-warming carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. (Fountain, 2020) Wetlands, then, are particularly vulnerable since peat releases the carbon it holds so well once it begins to dry out. Added to the conditions that aggravate this

risk are the natural oils held in peat, the result of decomposed plant life, containing volatile oils. This is what makes it so flammable when used as a source of heat. The result of dried peat bogs is that they can catch fire and burn underground, releasing not only much more carbon dioxide, but smoke as well, adding to air pollution and further environmental damage. An incident that demonstrates this very point is to be found in the underground peat fires in Greenland, northeast of Sisimiut, between 31 July and 21 August, 2017.

## How do the Wetlands help to Control Flooding?

Mires, generally speaking, act as important water reservoirs and offer flood protection during periods of snow melt and heavy precipitation. In these days of uncertain weather patterns especially, wetlands have a capacity to soak up excess water, and moderate the flooding that would otherwise occur. There are two terms that apply to freshwater ecosystems: they are “lotic”, which refers to areas with flowing water, including rivers, deltas, streams and estuaries. And the other is “lentic”, applied to areas where there is standing water, such as lakes, wetlands and ponds. (Prowse et al., 2006.) In Arctic conditions, the frozen water is trapped in place until warmer weather brings melting conditions. With climate change, this is happening at alarming rates. Here too, artists have the ability to make real and more apparent what scientific data is showing us through statistics. Two different artists are a case in point.

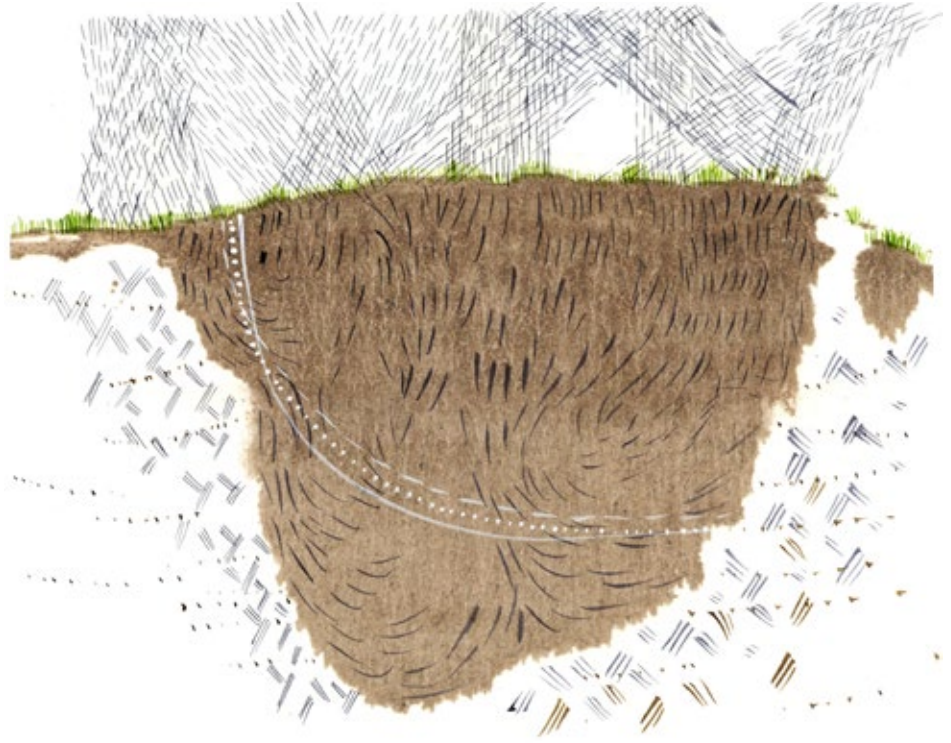
The first is Adrien Segal, whose work in Alaska at the Grewingk Glacier in Kachemak Bay is an excellent example of how scientific and geologic data may be transformed in the hands of an inspired artist. Her webpage is dedicated to this project (Segal, n.d.). Through a scrupulously rendered and documented process, she transforms the effect of climate change in a visibly vanishing and wrenchingly powerful aesthetic. She collects the data and precise geographical measurements of declining glacial levels, and then uses this to make structural forms that are precisely accurate according to the recorded metrics. Then, she collects melted glacial water. She pours the water into the constructed forms, and recreates a frozen glacier in miniature, but to exact scale. Subsequently, she places it outside, and records its poignant melting diminishment. For Segal, attention to detail is paramount; nothing is erroneously represented. [Segal is currently the Fulbright Artist-Scholar in residence at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland from Jan-July '22].

Visualisation is another way in which artists and visual-eco-researchers may contribute. Dr. Kieran Baxter is a Scottish artist-researcher, and lecturer in Communication





**Figure 14.** Adrien Segal, *Grewingk Glacier Project*, 2015. Photograph: courtesy of the artist, ©Adrien Segal. (Segal, n.d.)



**Figure 15.** *Kate Foster, A Bog Profile, Peat print and ink drawing (2019). Image courtesy of the artist, ©Kate Foster.*

Design at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. His time-lapse video work demonstrates the rapidity of glacial melting footage, taken over a period of less than six weeks, and shows the significant retreat of the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier, within Vatnajökull National Park in the southeast of Iceland. Experts have highlighted that the rapid rate of summer melt is now significantly exceeding any ability of recovery during the winter months. (Baxter, 2022) Similarly, his video entitled “After Ice” dramatically contrasts aerial views of glaciers in the Hornafjörður region of Southeast Iceland with historic photographs of the same shots, to visibly reveal the shocking facts of a rapidly disappearing frozen world. (Baxter, 2022a)



Dr. Kate Foster is another Scottish artist whose life and work in both Scotland and the Netherlands involves processes of visualisation, leading toward a more enlightened understanding of what constitutes peatlands. She has been researching and visualising peat lands for many years, and her creative art practice is concerned with different kinds of soils and land use, focusing on wetlands. Various projects prepared the way for making links to *Peatland Connections*. “Peatland Connections” is a Crichton Carbon Centre project using arts and science to reconnect rural communities, scientists, land managers and policymakers with land use decisions.” (Peatland Connections, n.d.) Through drawings and interpreted scientific data in visual form about raised bogs, for example, and through site visits and public workshops, she dedicates her work to the merging of soil and peat data with various visual and material treatments. Currently, she is the Artist-in-residence at the International Soil Reference and Information Centre (ISRIC) World Soil Museum in the Netherlands. (New Artist-in-residence at World Soil Museum Invites Peatland Conversations | ISRIC, n.d.) In Figure 15, her aesthetic approach to the drawing of peat is a visual celebration, and intended “to generate dialogue and engagement around peatland and wetland soils.” She shares with Harrison, as cited above, the vision of the epic struggle of life to endure, as borne out evidenced in soils.

## How do the Indigenous People Live in, and With, the Wetlands?

The American state of Minnesota, ‘The Land of a Thousand Lakes,’ has two main groups of Indigenous peoples, the Dakota and Ojibwe (“Chippewa” as they are known in the USA; *Anishinaabe* in their own language), and both have a reverence for water and the wetlands.

Dakota people believe that water is the source of life. “Where the two waters come together, otherwise referred to as *B’dote*, is the center of Dakota spirituality and history. This is where the Dakota people began.” In the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, is the land most sacred to the Dakota peoples. The preservation of the waters has the greatest social, spiritual and historic significance to the Dakota nation, and this is played out politically as well, in their efforts to protect the watersheds of all the land, threatened by pipelines and mining pollution. Dakota artist and activist, Mona Smith plays out much of this belief system in her installations and website, *B’dote Memory Map* (Minnesota Humanities Center).

Ojibwe rural practices embrace a relationship with the environment that is balanced and reflects a sense of stewardship. The harvesting of wild rice, which is not actually rice,



**Figure 16.** Minnesota Chippewa (Ojibwe) harvesting wild rice in late summer. Photograph: Unknown, in the Creative Commons.

but a form of grass seed (*Zizania palustris*), is called *manoomin* in their language. It is harvested in canoes by gently beating the tall grass stalks that stand proud of the water. The floor of the canoes, or in handmade wide birch-bark baskets, are where the grain is collected as the foragers slowly paddle through the wetlands. But overly high water levels, and wildly fluctuating weather patterns make the late summer harvest less certain now than days in the past.

In March 2020, in Ontario, Canada, the Mer Bleu contains “rare plants such as Porsild’s cottongrass, Southern twayblade, Torrey’s manna grass and regionally significant black spruce-larch forest, more typical of Canada’s Boreal forest zone. The site also supports nine species of orchid and carnivorous plants such as sundews and pitcher plants. Significant fauna includes beaver, muskrat, abundant waterfowl, and the rare spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*).” (Global distribution of peatlands/ GRID-Arendal, 2022).

## What can be Done to Control the Loss of Habitat for Native Species?

It is reported that globally, wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. Why? Because they are not valued, as the quote by Berkes above notes when he states, “Our view of the world and the universe and how we relate to them is the *source* of our values”. The pervasive narrative is that these lands are ‘empty’, unused wastelands. Humans cannot readily *see* a way that they might have their lives improved by these spaces, since they are difficult to navigate. Through a lack of knowledge, access and understanding, they are disregarded at best—or like the ill-advised Scottish councillor who by now must surely regret his words, ‘MAMBA’

Here is where there is a chance for artists to make a difference. For example, in this work in Figure 17 by Waltercio Caldas, the minimal form is perched upon rocks on a stony shore in way which suggests both notional ‘doors’ at either end, balanced in a teeter-totter fashion upon the fulcrum of stone. With a minimum of material, he draws in three-dimensions the portals of perception, opening out onto the landscape, and balancing these elements upon the stony base of the earth. The tension of balance and its current stasis seem momentary. The doors are spaces to which we can see but cannot enter; space itself is the subject in the grand panoramic scale of sea meeting the land.

Across the world, it seems that the sense of urgency to address problems-- and the moment for willingness to inform the general public – are now ubiquitous. For example, 15 initiatives across Norway may now fall into the category of ‘wetland information centers’. All of the centers are situated in close proximity to wetlands themselves, and most are Ramsar sites. The educational centers target a variety of groups, like tourists, children, and the local population.





**Figure 17.** *Waltercio Caldas (b. 1946- Brazil), Around, (1994), sited in the Leirfjord municipality, Helgeland, Norway. One of the Artscape Nordland commissions. Photograph: Courtesy of Vegar Moen, ©Vegar Moen.*

## Political and Social Actions to Protect Wetlands

In understanding ecosystems, the first lesson to be learned is one of interconnectedness. The interdependence of nation states to cooperate, and understand themselves as linked, is also an instance of inter-connection, as the Ramsar sites have demonstrated. Norway's actions are based on its institutional arrangements with its neighbours. Firstly, Norway has been coordinating with the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) to regulate total emissions from its industrial and energy sectors and commercial aviation within the European Economic Area. This was agreed in Oct. 2021. Pollution from one place in the world can have its most dramatic effects realised in a distant land. Therefore, Norway has also undertaken to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030, compared to the reference year 1990.

## What Role can (and do) Artists Play in Helping to Preserve these Wetlands?

Of all of the artists whose work has been described above, and those following, there is an important role that artists play in dedicating their work to site-specific projects, and collaborative, community, or commissioned projects. More correctly, it should be stated that there are *many* roles to play! Among these might be listed the process of visualisation, as described above. Transforming scientific data that has little emotional appeal in itself as statistics, into works that are equally aesthetic, compelling, and powerful, has the ability of communicating in ways beyond what databanks might achieve.

There is a power of artistic imagination: an artist's leap to answer 'what if' allows for fresh insights and new thinking. Materials themselves have powers to convey, stimulate and signify beyond the artist's own control. Artworks speak without the preliminary need for verbalisation, and in doing so, have the ability to move deeply, to speak to something deeply embedded in the human psyche, pre-verbal and meaningful, with an ability to affect emotions, actions or even a change in behaviour. This also means offering a hope of change, like Haraway's imprecation to "stay with the trouble" (2016) or Attenborough's comment that "The living world is a unique and spectacular marvel..." and that we must act quickly to allow "rebounding" for restoration of habitats, saying that "there is some hope that the world can change" (William, 2021).

The late US artist, Robert Smithson (1938 – 1973), has continued to inspire generations of artists with his site-specific works and writings, entailing a deep understanding of a sited work, when he opined that one cannot fully understand the work of art without being *in* its context.

Rachel Withers has written more recently about the *Artscape Nordland* project, explaining that these artworks offer an exemplary early model of good negotiating practice, citing collaborations with local municipalities and the artists themselves as they engaged in proposals and ultimately, with the approval and enthusiasm of local communities. (Withers, 2018). The origins of the project are explained thus:

Conceived in the late 1980s by Norwegian artist A K Dolven for Norway's vast (nearly 40,000 square kilometer) Nordland county and concluded in 2015, Artscape Nordland's development involved detailed community consultations. (2018)

Withers accepted an invitation to tour and review these works, but not entirely without some sense of trepidation. Generally, she felt "... permanent public artworks, however

interesting in themselves... never simply enhance a site." (Withers, 2018). She goes on to explain:

They (sited public artworks) shut down possible ways of seeing, reading and inhabiting an environment, as well as adding new ones. The issue is whether what's gained outweighs what is lost.

This general observation is not only shared by many, but may be the criteria by which these works might be said to achieve their own environmental impact. What does each work suggest to the viewer that complements the site? Or, asked another way, what insights and understandings are to be gained by the siting of these works where they are situated? How does the conceptual rigour and aesthetic decisions inherent in the work speak to the land, water and environment in which they are placed?

Here, an observation by John Dewey seems relevant:

We have no word in the English language that unambiguously includes what is signified by the two words "artistic" and "aesthetic." Since "artistic" refers primarily to the act of producing and "aesthetic" to that of perception and enjoyment, the absence of a term designating the two processes taken together is unfortunate. (Dewey, 2005, p. 48.)

"Unfortunate" it must be assumed, because if one conflates one with the other, without the language to distinguish the interconnections between the two, there is the loss of comprehension or appreciation. And here too, perhaps, is the reason for Withers' unease, and the separation between works that are in themselves aesthetically pleasing, but not necessarily enhanced by the siting –or, the site enhanced by their presence. It is not the case that these are mutually exclusive, of course. But the carefully conceived marriage of materials, site, form and integrity behind these works are the questions and associations that a reflective viewer brings to these pieces. Once again, Dewey observes: "In short, art, in its form, unites the very same relation of doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy that makes an experience to be an experience." (Dewey, 2005, 51.)

An impressive roster of internationally famous names are among the artists whose works are included in these *Artscape Nordland* sites: US sculptor Dan Graham, Brazilians Waltercio Caldas and Cildo Meireles, Swiss sculptor Markus Raetz, the Italian Luciano Fabro, and the UK's Anthony Gormley, Tony Cragg and Anish Kapoor, among others. Other than the unfortunately oft-repeated lament that so few women artists feature in this group, it is a collection of first-rate artists.

In the other northern wetland areas, in Norway, Scotland and elsewhere where artists intervene, either through commissions or collaborative projects, it is fair to ask some of the same critical questions about what the work achieves, whether it is an aesthetic statement which adds to an understanding, a discourse or an impact in the environment, or an the appreciation of a place made manifest.

## What is the Hope for the Future of Northern Wetlands?

In environmental terms, it seems that the current consensus is the preservation of bio-diversity in the flora and fauna of wetlands, the conservation of these sites as far as possible, or--as in the example of removing the misjudged forestry plantings in the Flow Country, as seen in Imlach's *Fieldwork* video (Imlach, 2018), the habitats are restored, or, as sometimes referred to, as 'rewetting projects'-- drainage is reversed and attempts are made to keep the original wetlands' topographical formations intact.

Here again, Dewey provides us with an insight with which to conclude. He argues that the concept of "art" can only become a noun (thing, or achieving the quality of 'thingliness') when it has obtained a quality of both doing and being done. Within the landscape, this has real impact: an artists' sited work is both a "doing"- the action of a vision that works its way into a viewer's understanding through reflection of the site and the work as meaningful together, doubly reflexive in that the environment inflects upon the work and the work upon the site's significance. And "being done" is its ongoing state, its continued potential to unfold in significance, to accrue in meaning, to ask of us an engagement that is not completed.

As Dewey suggests, when we refer to actions such as performance or singing (or installation and ecological intervention projects) as "arts," we are also saying there is art that is not just the final result, but that art is within the action itself, being art and/by becoming art.

What seems apparent then, in sited artistic interventions, whether as socially-engaged environmental actions, or responding to individual observations and concerns that range from the survival of life forms to the envisioning of new ways of seeing the earth, the doing and the being in the present tense is the 'being done' in the near past tense. "Doing" as a verb is the key; it is the dynamic action taken in response to the demand—and the hope-- for positive change.



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## Endnotes

- 1 Norway's Ramsar sites were designated due to their importance as habitat for birds for nesting, staging and feeding, however, ecosystem services such as water purification and carbon sequestration have also been part of the motivation for designation in several sites. "Inland deltas are important for migrating birds and provide important ecosystem services such as sediment trapping and nutrient fixation. The largest inland delta in Norway is Nordre Øyeren in southern Norway. The site includes low islands and land giving way to Lake Øyeren." These statistics are quoted from the Nordic Baltic Wetlands Initiative (NorBalWet), which was established in Trondheim, Norway, in 2005, based on Ramsar Resolution VIII.30 on "Regional initiatives for the further implementation of the Convention."
- 2 This essay focuses on northern wetlands, but it is worth noting that there are globally that as of May 2018, "the list of wetlands of international importance included 2,331 Ramsar sites covering over 2.1 million square kilometres (810,000 sq mi). The countries with most sites are the United Kingdom with 175 and Mexico with 142. The country with the greatest area of listed wetlands is Bolivia, with around 148,000 square kilometres (57,000 sq mi)." "Ramsar Sites Around the World". <https://www.norbalwet.org/our-wetlands/norway>

# Trans-corporeal Photographies: Landscapes of a More Than Human World

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In this chapter I will develop my current inquiry which reimagines Barad's intra-action (2007) in terms of photographic practice, I will build this further towards photography as "a transversal entity" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 82) to explore the possibilities of "[t]hinking as the stuff of the world" (Alaimo, 2014, p. 13). I propose this in order to conceive photography as a more than human practice, that is, a practice which generates images of ongoing "ontological entanglements" (Barad 2007, p. 333), or photographs, in Baradian terms, *as* phenomena. The research terrain that I am exploring is rich in its relevance to northern and Arctic peoples; Barad has developed a theoretical framework which specifically acknowledges the agency of matter in the world which she describes as "agential realism" (2007), the complex and iterative intra-activity of the world's performativity (Barad, 2011, p. 125). Barad's articulation of agentic realism calls to question classical ontology's conception of matter as stable, bounded, passive and by extension, available for human extraction without consequence. She uses the terminology phenomena instead of object or thing to draw our attention to the problematics of fixed subject/object binaries (enacted by a Cartesian cut) to describe the agentic relationality of intra-acting matter (enacted by an agential cut). Phenomena are manifested by "material-discursive intra-actions" (Barad, 2011, p. 125), a worlding of the world through generative entanglement. Of specific relevance to thinking about landscape and place is Barad's understanding that knowing and being are inseparable: we know *in* being. Furthermore, to take care in our knowing in being and to be ethical in our responsibility, which is "the ability to respond to the other" (Barad, 2007, p. 392), is described by Barad as "ethico-onto-epistem-ology" (2007, p.185). In this regard Barad acknowledges the wisdom of indigenous thinkers such as Daniel R. Wildcat and Vine Deloria, especially in relation to matters of time (Barad, 2017, p. 58). Knowing from place through time is beautifully articulated by Wildcat when he writes:

**Figure 1.** *Ecologies of entanglement I (detail)*. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.



there is no single road per se to human improvement. There are many paths, each situated in the actual places, such as prairies, forests, deserts, and so forth, and environments where our tribal societies and cultures emerged. The experiences of time and history are shaped by places. (2005, p. 434)

Wildcat goes on to state that knowledge which addresses democracy is “emergent from complex biological interactions and cultural communities (environments), a much broader experience than current human-centred conceptions.” (2005, p. 434) The world-view that indigenous human history is part of a bigger “natural history” (Wildcat, 2005, p.434) is more often than not lost on Western neo-liberal capitalist society. Western civilization, writes Wildcat, has attempted to get everyone everywhere running to the same schedule (2005, p. 434) resulting in the subjection of indigenous peoples to a “brutal Western metaphysical road-building project” (Wildcat, 2005, p. 434). The lively, agentic materiality of the world therefore “necessitates more capacious epistemologies” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2) which need to give space to different ways of knowing that pay attention to the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016; Wildcat 2005). Barad’s respect for material agency and intra-action is, according to Alaimo, of significance to the contemporary climate emergency because “elaborate, colossal human practices, extractions, transformations, productions, and emissions have provoked heretofore unthinkable intra-actions at all levels.” (2010, p. 21) Herein lies the relevance of this chapter to the concern of the more than human landscapes in northern and Arctic regions. The responsiveness of eco-systems and ecologies to intra-actions between the human and the nonhuman world, whether beneficent or harmful, speaks to their entanglement and inseparability (Barad, 2011, p. 125). The unintended environmental consequences that the world is now facing are indeed monstrous in scale and in their capitalist Western anthropogenic making they are entirely without precedent.

Food security and the future of food are significant global issues. The inter-disciplinary practice that I am currently developing through a number of collaborative projects engages with food from several perspectives, from the future heritages of food, to the agentic materialism of taste-scapes (Everett, 2019) which are formed by assemblages of human and nonhuman agents (Bennett, 2010, p. 28; Braidotti, 2013, p. 82). In this chapter, I will reflect on images which have been made in the immediate vicinity of The Glasgow School of Art’s Highlands & Islands campus situated on the Altyre Estate in Moray. The photographs are provisional and experimental: they explore inter-mediality and the interpenetration of one practice in another. They play with light sensitivity, use



**Figure 2.** Archival reworking: work in progress. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

drawing, text, static electricity, plants, architectural space and memory. They have been produced *in camera*, in the etymological sense of inside a room, on a window approximating the ground glass screen of a large format camera, and use various image making devices, such as smart phones, digital cameras and a photocopier. They include hand inscription in graphite, ciphers, chemical symbols and indexical methods, for example through direct printing using photosensitive papers and photographic prints (Figure 2).

In order to try to explore this expansive photographic doing, I will mobilise Stacy Alaimo's "trans-corporeality" (2010) to think through photography as a practice which traverses and transects many bodies, human and nonhuman: animal, mineral, vegetal and machine. In addition, following María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) I will investigate this in relation to matters of care and the ethical imperatives of working in more than human worlds. *Relate North* is a series which has consistently explored collaborative practice and participatory pedagogies; what I would call pedagogies of sociability. The series has provided an important space for scholars to demonstrate learning in, from

and with northern environments and Arctic landscapes. In the text that follows, I will continue this trajectory via an exploration of subjectivity and agency, photography and phenomena, in the ecosystems of rural and northern landscapes. Although the context that I work in is not Arctic *per se*, the writing and images will surface the urgency of developing caring, inter-disciplinary creative practices which I believe will have resonance for our Arctic neighbours.



**Figure 3.** Roseisle Forest. Photograph: Gina Wall, 2011.

My research-led practice to date has primarily focused on photography, time and place, and the sometimes spectral and queer encounters with landscape. I have drawn more recently from the discourse of the archaeology of the contemporary past (González-Ruibal, 2007; Harrison, 2013; Harrison & Breithoff, 2017; Pétursdóttir & Olsen, 2014) and I am particularly attentive to the landscape as living archive (Wall & Hale, 2020) which enfolds unspectacular ruins, heritage sites, roadsides, forests and gardens. The notion of the temporary ruin is also of interest to me, for example, through visits to leisure landscapes out of season which generate encounters with place that are made strange by the out of kilter interface between the built environments of the experience economy and the living world. In addition, archaeological discourse around the contemporary past opens up the possibility of thinking time through archaeology, of thinking *now* as always already haunted by the past, by the remains that hang on. Indeed, the way in which archaeological artefacts materially transect time is compelling to me and I am particularly interested in the current discourse in contemporary archaeology which focuses on the material disruption of the past *now*, or the archaeology *in* and *of* the present (Harrison, 2011, p. 141).

Time classically considered as a linear, forward moving trajectory is problematised by the hauntology of archaeological remains and if we subject *now* to a productive haunting in Derridean terms the present becomes haunted by *both* past and future (2006, p. 33). The crucial point in matters of the spectral is that the ghost is *neither* present *nor* absent, its apparitional appearance unsettles being (*Dasein*) and time, as Derrida writes: “there is no *Dasein* of the specter but there is no *Dasein* without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity...of some specter [*sic.*]” (Derrida, 2006, p. 125), which is to say there is no ontology without hauntology. Furthermore, thinking the spectral through photography in the expanded field of writing, that is, through the syntax of photographic practice (repetition, elision, difference and delay) gives a writing that is haunted by time, not simply metaphorically, but a hauntology of photography that is sensibly and materially *enacted* in and through its practice. The intra-actions of photography enact a material-discursive practice which also enfolds the industrial complex of the medium; its difficult history as a technique of observation and control; its function as a colonial apparatus; and the racial bias of those who developed photography which is inscribed in the very photochemical materials themselves (Lewis, 2019). These material-discursive enactments are the spectres of photography which problematise its certainties and challenge us to think deeply and yet speculatively about photographic images. The ghosts of the medium implore us to think differently about photographs.

Given my attention to spectral and queer temporalities, I am also interested in the affordances to thought which emerge when the concerns of archaeology, time and the spectral are entangled with Karen Barad's *spacetime-mattering* (2010, p. 261) and "cut" (Barad, 2014) performatively through photographic practice. Barad is perhaps best known for the book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). She is a theoretical, quantum physicist by training, as well as a feminist philosopher, whose key influences include Bohr and Derrida. Critical concerns that she shares with Derrida are the urgency to trouble and critique binary oppositions, the deconstruction of normatively inscribed identities, and an open-ness to the spectral. Indeed, for Barad quantum physics demonstrates that *matter itself* is haunted (2010, p. 247). What is particularly compelling about Barad's work is its navigation of the physical, material world in relation to philosophy, the way that it deals with matter and material becoming and her methodology of diffractive reading. To read diffractively is to read one text through another; to read diffractively is to acknowledge the intra-actions among texts, and the patterns formed in the in-between. To read diffractively is to understand that bodies and knowledges are enmeshed, as Barad writes: "Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated." (2007, p. 185) My subjective positionality as a person and a photographer is emergent from the intra-actions of the world, *I* comes to be relationally, *I* knows from place, as Barad writes:

We don't obtain knowledge from standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. (2007, p. 185)

Working counter to the reverberations of Cartesianism, Barad acknowledges the implication of ontology and epistemology through the discursive frame of onto-epistemology. Furthermore, she affirms the need for response-ability; which is to engage ethically with the world's worlding, and to exercise care in the practices of making knowledge. Barad's position is expressed by Sofie Sauzet as follows:

Researching phenomena, then, is a methodological practice of continuously questioning the effects of the way we research, on the knowledges we produce. This unfolds itself as an ethico-onto-epistemology of knowing in being. (2018)

Critical here is Barad's understanding of the ways in which apparatuses are also imbricated in the material becoming of the world. The apparatus of observation, in this case



the camera, intervenes in the world, intra-acting with bodies and things in a more than human matrix. This is a complex intra-action between photosensitive matter, technology, human and nonhuman bodies, and these intra-actions generate the phenomena that we describe as photographs. Many of the apparatuses Barad refers to from the discipline of experimental physics are built to observe the action of light (photons) over time. These experiments reveal the ghostly behaviours of the universe and one of the specific spectral encounters of the quantum field that is demonstrated through these experiments is the “ontological indeterminacy of time” (2017, p. 68) which means that all times and all places *always already* co-exist. Barad writes that “it is possible to do a diffraction experiment in both space and time at once whereupon a single particle will co-exist in a superposition of multiple places and times” (2017, p. 68). There is a “thickness of the here and now” (Barad, 2017, p. 73), this is a thick time, a queer time in which different temporalities thread through one another unsettling the present.

Citing the quantum eraser experiment, Barad argues that the past can be reworked in the future. Simply put, changing the apparatus of the experiment affects the results of the experiment *after* the encounter, that is, after the light has passed through the apparatus. By changing the method or apparatus of observation, that which is observed also changes, effectively calling the pastness of the past into question: “the past was never simply there to begin with and the future is not simply what will unfold” (Barad, 2011, p. 145). Therefore, the past is never truly over but is always subject to future iteration. Many of the ideas that Barad is advancing which are evidenced by the behaviour of quanta in the universe (and this is the very point) challenge our normative assumptions about the way things are, the way we are, and the way that matter in the universe should behave. Bringing Baradian discourse together with ideas about the landscape as a living archive (Wall & Hale, 2020) suggests that there is a need to reckon with material haunting(s) as they accumulate and gather in the landscape.

Significant to the work of both Alaimo and Puig de la Bellacasa is the important contribution made by Latour through his theorisation of the nature/culture hybrid and matters of concern. Following Latour (2004), we might also think of photographs as new objects which are entangled and rhizomatic, objects which are implicated in their scientific, industrial and technological production, as instructively shown by Lewis’ work on deconstructing the racist bias of Shirley cards, manufactured by Kodak (2019). These would be for Latour, “matters of concern” rather than “matters of fact” (2004, p. 22). Matters of concern are to be distinguished from the “poor epistemological category” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 32) of matters of fact insofar as they are exemplified by the La-

toureaan nature/culture hybrid which draws attention to the enmeshed, mediated nature of these new objects. Furthermore, Puig de la Bellacasa expands the Latoureaan matter of concern, to matter of *care*, which is a manoeuvre that emerges from her deep engagement with feminist philosophy; for her, care is an “ethico-political concern” (2017, p. 28). Writing of Latour’s hybrids, Puig de la Bellacasa states: “A thing, conceived as such, is both a construction and reality. And if ‘things’ are matters of concern, it is also because they are gathering a collective that forms around a common concern.” (2017, p. 33) If we extend Puig de la Bellacasa’s own reading we can speculate that if things are also matters of care, they coalesce around common matters of concern to form collectives of care.

In common speech, we talk about bodies of photography to describe the collective works of a photographer; a material, visual *corpus*. Through a process of working towards an understanding of photography as a trans-corporeal practice I would like to explore what the significance might be of figuring the photographic body, the maker, and the photographic worlding as a “transversal entity” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 82). Which is to say, what does it mean for the discipline of photography if we think of subjectivity in excess of the human? Braidotti argues that in terms of thinking subjectivity the challenge for critical theory is “momentous” (2013, p. 82) and it follows two trajectories: one is to develop a theory or concept of materiality which is vital and self-organising, and the other is to reconfigure subjectivity transversally as “an assemblage that includes non-human agents” (2013, p. 82). As Braidotti points out, this way of thinking about the world means that subjectivity can no longer be seen as the domain of the human (*anthropos*) and therefore the challenge for critical theory is to convey this expanded subjectivity in language, which is already laden with anthropocentric biases. Braidotti writes that we need to “visualize the subject as a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours, the animals and the earth as a whole” (2013, p. 82). Braidotti’s concern as a critical theorist is to execute this using the framework of language. However, it is pertinent to note that she asks us to *visualize* this expanded subjectivity. Herein lies an important role for photography and other visual and creative practices, particularly given the concern of many contemporary practitioners with inter-disciplinarity and the engagements with the non-human. Indeed, it could be argued that photographs are a way of visualising the ontological entanglements with the world, or perhaps more radically expressed, photographs are *spacetime-matterings*; visual materialisations of ethico-onto-epistem-ological entanglement.

The notion of a transversal subject which intra-acts across bodies (vegetal, mineral, animal, human, machine) resonates with Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality

(2010) which is to understand the body as enfolded in the world, not simply with respect to touch and proximity as one might find in a phenomenological understanding of experience, but a body that is imbricated often at a distance in the “substantial interchanges, flows and substances of the co-extensive world” (Alaimo, 2014, p. 17). Alaimo writes: “to think as a body...is an entangled, provisional, highly mediated, but also potentially ethical and political endeavor [*sic.*]” (2014, pp. 16-17)

Alaimo’s trans-corporeality foregrounds the “strange agencies” (2014, p. 13) of materials, the situatedness of bodies and their intra-action with global systems (ecosystems, built environments, weather). For Alaimo the very act of thinking mobilises “the stuff of the world” (2014, p. 13). To think in this way is to think from inside of the world, which is “a mode of thought that embeds theorists, activists, and artists within material substances, flows and systems” (2014, p. 13). Thinking as the stuff of the world teaches me to think from within photography, from within its agentic materiality in order to consider some of the flows and systems which have enabled its becoming.

In *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, María Puig de la Bellacasa reads Haraway’s situated knowledge speculatively as a way to *think with care* (2017, p. 69), writing: “That knowledge is situated means that knowing and thinking are inconceivable without the multitude of relations that make possible the worlds we think with.” (2017, p. 69) Furthermore, it is Puig de la Bellacasa’s contention that knowing and thinking must be done with care, and that care itself “is relational per se” (2017, p. 69). Indeed, the extent to which the more than human world supports a “degree of livability” is dependent upon the care it can sustain (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 70):

Standing by the vital necessity of care means standing for sustainable and flourishing relations, not merely survivalist or instrumental ones. Continuing to hold together a triptych vision of care doings – practice/affectivity/ethics – politics helps to resist to ground care as an ethico-affective everyday doing that is vital to engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences.

(Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 70)

That is to say, for Puig de la Bellacasa, the necessity of care exceeds its instrumentalist and survivalist demands, care doing as practices which positively affect others are essential for thriving relations.

Pertinent here, given its resonance with Karen Barad’s conceptualisation of “cutting together apart” (2010, p. 245) as a way of relating (and for me, as a way of making photographic relations), is María Puig de la Bellacasa’s notion of the “critical cut” (2017, p.79)

and its relevance for the flourishing of care doing. This cut does not divide worlds, on the contrary, for Puig de la Bellacasa it creates worlds through new connectivities, new relations, “cuts foster relationships” (2017, p. 78). She argues that to affirm “beings do not pre-exist their relatings means that our relatings have consequences” (2017, p. 79) which is to say that we must be mindful of the reverberations, or indeed the diffractions, of our intra-actions. Thinking with care in our relatings also means that we must recognise the inheritance of “a web of relationalities” (Puig de la Bellcasa, 2017, p. 78) that we *think-with*, that makes our new patterns of thinking possible. It is therefore important for me to acknowledge that much of what I make and write owes a debt to those with whom I think with. The photographic works which are discussed a little later in this text are phenomena produced intra-actively with human and nonhuman agencies and I have recently been fortunate to collaborate alongside the culinary artist and chef Marente van der Valk (<https://marentevandervalk.com>). Although the deficiencies of the images are entirely my own, in many ways they could not have emerged without the critical cut that created this new web of relationality which repatterned my thought through the valuable opportunity of *thinking-with* another.

Given this, we might also ask, what could it mean to carefully think-with, or write-with photographically? What might practising photography as ethico-onto-epistem-ologically entangled, as a transversal cut entail? What might *photographer* or indeed *artist* mean in these terms? For Barad, phenomena are the particular intra-actions between “an ‘object’; and the ‘measuring agencies’; the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them.” (2007, p. 128) Considered in this way, photography is a practice of entanglement between apparatus, light sensitive materials and world; a lively intra-action between these entities which enacts an agential cut that is part of the unfolding performance of the world (Barad, 2011, p. 125). Here I borrow Barad’s articulation of the apparatus to argue that the flick of the shutter, or the momentary deactivation of the sensor, can be considered as an agential cut through which the photograph-as-writing is iterated as a dis/continuous material becoming of the world (Barad, 2010, p. 245). The rapid opening and closing of the shutter (or the momentary switching off and on of a digital camera’s sensor) is a “cutting together apart” (Barad, 2010, p. 245) of the material universe which constitutes the *material-discursive* practice of photography. As Sauzet puts it: “Agential cuts are momentary stabilizations, doings rather than beings.” (2018) Therefore, to think of the performative cut of photography as instantiating stillness is to think of photography as a relating and a doing: photographs are beyond objects. Photographic practice stills particular configurations



**Figure 4.** *Ecologies of entanglement III.* Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

of the world, rather than inscribing Cartier Bresson's famed decisive moment. Photographs create diffraction; "a politics of generating difference" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 72), they are "where the disparate itself *holds together*, without wounding the dis-jointure, the dispersion, or the difference, without effacing the heterogeneity of the other." (Derrida, 2006, p. 35) Photography performs phenomena, but in heeding Barad's call for an ethico-onto-epistemology (2007, p. 185) we should also understand our responsibility in this, for "the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter." (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

There is "no privileged position from which knowledges can be produced" (Sauzet, 2018), therefore the artist does not sit outside of the world, observing and making in response to it, but engages in a material discursive creative practice which intra-acts *in* the world. Agency is therefore not exclusively a human characteristic, a property of human individuals, but is distributed across beings and things; it is relational. As Sauzet puts



it, “we might recognize agency in different forms, as relations, movements, repetitions, silences, distances, architecture, structures, feelings, things, us/them/it, words...” (2018) The *things* we create in collaboration with are entangled with the practices we inhabit (Sauzet, 2018) and our ability to be responsible (Barad, 2007, p. 392) in our intra-actions with the world. But who is the photographer, who is the artist? As previously seen from Braidotti’s transversal subject, and Alaimo’s trans-corporeality, the subject is co-extensive with the world: I am not singular, nor am I fully human: I am animal, mineral, vegetal; I am more than human, I am we.

Bread breathes with the humours of place, the wild yeast captured from the atmosphere intra-acts with flour and water, warmed by the summer air. Each time the recipe is mixed it is a different configuration, a different day, a different atmosphere; with each incorporation the bacteria on my hands vary, each time a different flora and fauna. Bread, once a living body, will be consumed by a living body, and it will become a living body again. As Alaimo writes: “[p]erhaps the most palpable trans-corporeal substance is food, since eating transforms plants and animals into human flesh.” (2010, p. 12) The trans-corporeality of bread is also expressed through its intra-action with place. The agentic materialities of place mesh with the mattering of bread through raw materials, implements and bios. These bodies are co-extensive with the world: “The recognition that bodies and places are continuous incites transit across traditional disciplinary boundaries.” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 11)

As I lay in bed one night, unable to sleep I thought vividly of the photograph of the kitchen counter at the Altyre campus, with the bowl of dough, the Pyrex jug and stainless-steel spoon, the dusting of flour and the wet ring mark from the jug which had temporarily darkened the wood. I thought about photography migrating across traditional disciplinary boundaries and wondered where the activity of bread making stopped and photography began. I remembered the distinctive smell of the fermented dough and the bitter childhood memories it evoked; I *wondered* about photography – the photograph, assembled through the proximity of sensor, lens, electricity, critical materials, ceramic, glass, wood, oxygen, metal, wild yeast, bacteria, sunlight, blood, bone, body: what Bennett would call a “human-nonhuman assemblage” (2010, p. 28). This particular iteration of trans-corporeal photography mobilises an aliveness, something bodily. The image is materialised intra-actively, in transit across the boundaries of photography, food, soil, bacterial and vegetal agency. The photograph bleeds into place and place bleeds into the photograph, as a thing and as a phenomenon in the making. Thinking about the body of the photograph and place as a kind of continuity lends itself to the idea that the thing-



**Figure 5.** *Ecologies of entanglement II.* Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

ness of the photograph is interpenetrated by atmospherics, by dampness, by radiation, by the constant transit of atomic particles. And if we look for the boundary of the image, we become aware of an almost vertiginous chain of events which brings each particular photographic assemblage together.

As we have already seen, Sauzet argues that Barad's thinking reminds us that we should be sensitive to the way we research, and of the knowledge we produce, or as I would argue, that we think *we* produce. It is my contention that to think of photography as a trans-corporeal practice, however speculative that may be, is to think from a position of careful knowing in being. Following Donna Haraway, María Puig de la Bellacasa states that we need to exercise care in our semiotic technologies, in our meaning making practices - the "arts of fabricating meaning with signs, words ideas, descriptions, theories" (2017, p. 71). This trans-corporeal photography is an example of semiotic technology that I have previously called practice-as-writing, but in this context, we might call photography-in-excess; it is a semiotic technology which is to be practised with care.



**Figure 6.** *Loch of Blairs.* Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

Previous thinking about landscape that I've engaged in sought to disrupt the idea of landscape as view (2010), and following Jackson (1984) returned to the etymology of the word to surface its older meaning as a collection of lands, the landscape as a synthetic space. The landscape synthesises the human and the nonhuman, helping to resist the notion of landscape as view, and along with it the ocular-centric privilege ingrained in certain patterns of thought. In recalibrating the hierarchies of sensory value, the significance



**Figure 7.** *Ecologies of entanglement IV.* Photograph: Gina Wall, 2022.

of other engagements with landscape emerges. In the context of the tourist gaze, Everett (2019) discusses John Urry's observations about the multiplicity of touristic engagement which exceeds the visual to include smell, sound and touch. Of relevance here is Urry's notion of the "taste-scape" which he discusses in an interview with Adrian Franklin (as cited by Everett, 2019, p. 7). I would like to use Urry's notion of the taste-scape as a point from which to think through the intra-active entanglements between human and non-human agents specifically through the gathering of wild botanicals for eating which are intimately enmeshed in place.

Taste-scapes enfold into the land's scape, threading iteratively through memory, time and place; phenomena recursively pleating a thickness of the here and now. The taste-scape of the waterside at the Loch of Blairs starts savoury, mineral and flat, it recalls a memory of time spent in the landscape, stretching long, picking watermint from the loch (Figure 5). The pleats of taste-scape and landscape are a materialisation of affect and memory; a sedimentation of the memory of the world. As Barad writes:

Memory – the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity – is written into the fabric of the world. The world 'holds' the memory of all traces; or rather the world is its memory (enfolded materialisation). (2010, p. 261)

Although some may argue that particular landscapes are taste-scapes, expressions of regional authenticity or *terroir*, in this sense I mean taste-scape as a pattern of affect and memory which is performative in the Baradian sense, it is always iteratively unfolding. As Puig de la Bellacasa writes "Being in the things we plunge into unsettled gatherings" (2017, p. 33) therefore, to attempt to precisely map the unsettled gathering of the taste-scape is a phantom task.

Hawthorn, or in old Gaelic *huathe*, is described as the queen of trees (Yelland, 2011, p. 135) and she has edible flowers, leaves and berries. The flowers are heavily scented, fetid almost; the odour is described by some as sickly and overpowering, yet it makes a beautiful drink when mixed with raw honey and nettle. Alaimo observes that although eating may seem perfectly routine "peculiar material agencies may reveal themselves during the route from dirt to mouth" (2010, p. 12) which resonates here insofar as the heavy odour of the hawthorn attracts carrion insects which are its principal pollinators (Yelland, 2011, p. 136). The flowers, white and tinged with pink are the colour of fatty flesh. I discover that the odour of decaying corpses emits the following chemical compounds – putrescine ( $\text{CH}_2)_4(\text{NH}_2)_2$  and cadaverine ( $\text{CH}_2)_5(\text{NH}_2)_2$  (Broadwith, 2012, p. 4). The photograph *Ecologies of entanglement IV* (Figure 7) emerged from a process of thinking across bodies



(human, tree, camera, book, internet, carrion insect, fly), a process which necessarily had to acknowledge that the artist shares “a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims and actions” (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2). From this speculative, research-led practice emerges a deeper understanding of the strange agencies of the hawthorn and the carrion insect, made stranger still by the fly which settled on the piece during its making.

The new relations forged by the critical cut (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 79) of photography has enabled these images to coalesce as an emergent body, supporting a conceptual and creative re-patterning through *thinking-with* others. The intra-active agential cut performed by trans-corporeal photography is “where the disparate itself *holds together*” (Derrida, 2006, p. 35). Thinking about practice in this way recognises the distributed and migratory agencies at play. The images are not the result of the photographer’s intention, they are not produced by creative genius, they are a lively becoming, momentary stabilisations in the ongoing worlding of the world. Thinking about photography as a trans-corporeal practice has helped me to enact photography from the inside, not as a distanced observer who operates the camera as a Cartesian cutting device, but as a creative practice of knowing in being. Learning from those who I have engaged in *thinking-with*, through the writing and the fieldwork which contributed to the making of the images, I appreciate more fully the care that relating in a more than human world requires. However, it is important to sound a note of caution. For Puig de la Bellacasa, care is freighted with normative hegemonic ethical positionings (2017, p. 12), there is an ambivalence to matters of care which can be expressed through uncaring care practices. Staying with the complexities of care requires, as Puig de la Bellacasa writes, “engaging with situated recognitions of care’s importance that operate displacements in established hierarchies of value and understanding how divergent modes of valuing care coexist and co-make each other in non-innocent ways.” (2017, p. 12) Therefore, I do not propose a creative caring with more than human worlds which takes a moralistic stance to the ethics of care. Rather, I propose to develop practices of creative care which take heed of care’s disruptive potential to recalibrate hierarchies of value (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 12).

This text and its accompanying images have emerged as *relata* which have iteratively intra-acted throughout their making. In this sense, this chapter does not review a finitude but indicates terrains for further inquiry. It suggests an approach to making which *thinks-with-others*, which seeks out new opportunities to relate to the landscapes of the more than human world. Taking its cue from María Puig de la Bellacasa, this making should take account of care’s power to disrupt established hegemonic values and *thinking-with* her ideas work toward a relational practice of creative caring in the north.

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# Understanding Landscape through the Interconnection of Different Forms of Knowledge

Three Examples from Living in the Landscape 2021

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**T**he *Arctic sustainable Arts and Design* (ASAD) network has developed and initiated international and interdisciplinary “Spring/Summer Schools”; Living in the Landscape (LiLa), where the goal is to bring together masters and PhD students from different disciplines to develop culturally sensitive and sustainable research on the sociocultural dimension of the Arctic and sub-Arctic landscape. The Faculty of Teacher Education, Art and Culture Studies at Nord University was a partner institution in LiLa 2021. The students and researchers who participated in LiLa 2021 came from institutions in Finland, Russia and Norway that are responsible for art education, art and design education and for teacher education, including science, arts and crafts and music.

The development of a multidisciplinary educational and scientific collaboration through the LiLa project was designed to meet the emerging challenges related to environment, population and economic life in the Arctic and subarctic region through multidisciplinary and artistic approaches (Jokela & Härkönen, 2021). The practices aimed to create encounters and dialogue between traditional forms of culture and contemporary practices and discover how these could be presented through art (Härkönen & Stöckell, 2019).

Outcomes of the school consisted of several parts: a physical product that was part of a digital exhibition (Härkönen et al., 2021) and digital exhibition <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/345326b826054361a50905c6d92a6b56>) and starting point for a visual essay. The essay (published in Härkönen et al., 2021) forms an essential part of the holistic art-based expression, where process and associated reflection emerge.

In this chapter, we will reflect on three examples which describe the holistic understanding of landscape through an interconnection between both natural science knowledge and cultural/art-based aspects. In this way, we will shed light on how the synthesis of these different forms of knowledge contribute to our understanding of landscapes and materials, and why this understanding is essential to illuminate how we can meet today’s ecological challenges from an eco-cultural sustainability perspective.

## Theoretical Grounding

### *Landscape*

Art and culture are man-made, and from that point of view we are rooted in a purely human-centric worldview. If we perceive the landscape as a culture and a carrier of culture in relation to traditions and resources for materials, we are moving in an anthropocentric paradigm. In an eco-centric paradigm, the landscape is understood as nature or as an ecosystem, and is about “how nature works” which, according to Cohen (1989) in Sauvé, 1996, “allows us to interact with it in an appropriate manner, so that nature is appreciated, respected and preserved”. In the natural sciences, humans are understood as a species that is an integral part of nature and landscape, living in interaction with and in a mutual dependence with both biotic and abiotic components.

To understand the landscape as a whole, we must move away from a basic worldview that puts man exclusively at the centre, in favour of a view of man as an integral part of the world on an equal footing with animals, plants, objects and other life forms (Illeris, 2017). The landscape is an interconnection between cultural and ecological aspects where different knowledge shapes our experience. In the landscape, nature and culture, the scientific and the cultural meet and Ingold (2020a, p.15) states:

it should now be clear why natural science and cultural anthropology converge on a common vertex. The anthropological claim of perceptual relativism – that people from different cultural backgrounds perceive reality in different ways since they process the same data of experience in terms of alternative frameworks of belief or representational schemata – does not undermine but actually reinforce the claim of natural science to deliver an authoritative account of how nature really works.

Both culture and nature are dynamic and constantly changing. According to Ingold (1993), it is also more productive to look at the landscape as temporary and as a process that is constantly transformed by the activities performed by the organisms, dwellers, that are present at all times. This combines the scientific and the artistic approach to the landscape in a more holistic way and on non-humanistic premises. This concept, that Ingold calls a *Taskscape* is used in LiLa.

### *Material*

In the culturally man-made world, materials appear as a resource we humans can use for various purposes. Also for arts and crafts, materials appear as primary resources with



certain characteristic properties and qualities. Most materials used in creative processes in arts and crafts come from a natural resource - a raw material (Näumann et al., 2020). In our context, the value of the materials is determined on the basis of what use it has for an artist or craftsman, ie. on human terms. Knowledge of the materials' properties and qualities are important when the aesthetic products are made. As an environmental sculptor, Andy Goldsworthy stated that "We need to shake hands with the material to fully understand it" (Goldsworthy, 2004) . This reflects his method to invade a setting and use his perceptions of nature in art-making, bringing natural materials like twigs, stones, leaves and water into conversation with natural forces like sunlight, wind, tide, and time.

As a reaction to anthropocentrism, eco-philosophers argue that we have direct responsibilities to natural objects such as animals, plants and landscape (Jakobsen, 2017).

In a post-humanist and new-materialist paradigm, natural science appears as eco-centric and looks at the intrinsic value of materials. Materials and organisms, living and non-living, are explored in relation to their chemical composition, structure, development and the interaction between materials/organisms in different natural cycles. In living organisms, physiological processes, behaviour and the interactions they have with each other are also explored: Is the relationship neutral, symbiotic or parasitic? This also includes man as an organism in line with many other materials and organisms.

In Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, the link between nature and culture is strong. This relationship can be described with the term 'eco-culture'. Knowledge based on eco-culture includes both traditional knowledge, ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge, tacit knowledge and local knowledge. As the eco-philosopher Arne Næss puts it, an increased understanding of us humans as a way of life in line with others will strengthen our presence in the world:

The greater understanding we have of our coexistence with other beings, the greater care we will show. Thus, the way is also open for joy over others' well-being and grief over their death and depravity: We seek our own best, but by self-expansion we thus also seek for others. (Næss, 1991, p. 278)

### *Eco-Cultural Sustainability*

Cultural sustainability deals with people's relationships to each other and their attitudes towards the environment (Härkönen et al., 2018; Stoltenberg, 2020/2010; Soini & Dessein, 2016). What has been created must be accounted for, and from a cultural sustainability

perspective it is important that we create a relationship also with the consumer culture. In this process, people can be innovative and influence the future with forward-looking ideas and values. The cultural sustainability perspective focuses on the local community's ability to continuously adapt to changes over time, at the same time as the culture lives on by acknowledging the culture's perspective, memories and ways of expression.

It is central to maintain and reflect on cultural traditions and practices as consumption patterns and environmental practices. In this discourse, one tries to find an answer to the question of whether our current cultures will be able to exist in the future (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). The same applies to nature and ecosystems and therefore Pedersen (2021) suggest a redefinition of "the social" in social sustainability where the inclusion of human-animal relations are necessary. Cultural sustainability is site-specific, i.e., each locality must evaluate its needs, rights and responsibilities in order to live more sustainable lives (Härkönen et al., 2018). The place helps in building identity, and can lead them to feel a stronger sense of belonging and motivation to take care of the place by giving ownership to issues in their own community (Sørmo et al., 2019). Therefore, we need to experience the world in reality (Jokela & Coutts, 2018). Eco-culture focuses on the experience of culture, local environment and interactions between nature and people both before and now and can contribute to people becoming happy in both nature and culture.

### *Methods*

In this article we extracted emerging themes from our three narratives, to shed light on the interconnection between natural science knowledge and cultural/art-based aspects to better understand the materials and landscape. Narratives allow us to express and comprehend individuals, cultures, historical periods and societies in the round (Richardson, 1997). The visual essays (published in Härkönen et al., 2021) appear as narratives and form an essential part of the holistic Art-Based Expression (ABE) where, through narrative inquiry, process and associated reflection emerge (Leavy, 2015).

### **Results: Three Art-Based Expressions (ABE) in Dialogue with Landscape.**

ABE highlights process and the associated artistic product. The emerging themes are how we understand the landscape, how we explored three different organisms/natural materials, and how the ABEs are eco-cultural anchored.

**ABE 1. *The Fishermen's Mittens of Helgeland, Mette Gårdvik (2021)***

This ABE concerns a community art project (Austin, 2008) that invited the participants of LiLa 2021, to cross borders by the art of knitting a pair of Fishermen's Mittens made from wool. With its special properties, wool is a unique natural material that is insulating and warm even when it's wet. Wool from the Old Norwegian Short Tail Landrace sheep breed has good insulating properties and was considered the best wool for the mittens. It consists of soft bottom wool and long, straight coat hair. The long, smooth cover hairs are water-repellent and the garment is strong at the same time as it retains heat. The participants were given an opportunity to wander from the coast of Helgeland, Northern Norway, and into the history of the fishermen's struggling life through their own contemporary experiences of knitting, felting and making a pair of mittens.

As dwellers (Ingold, 1993) in the arctic landscape, we are all connected through tradition and our memories can relate to cold hands and a warming pair of mittens. My



**Figure 1.** *Image 1, 2, 3, series. Fishermen's mittens were once one of the most important part of the work attire of fishermen along the Norwegian coast. When fishing in Lofoten, it was common practice to have a portrait of either your crew or yourself. The painted photography backdrops were a standard feature of early photography studios (1860 – 1920). All the fishermen are wearing the special home-made mittens. Photographs: Digital Museum*



**Figure 2.** Image 1, 2, 3 series. Wool from Old Norwegian Short Tail Landrace sheep is traditional used in making Fishermen`s Mittens. Reconstruction of old mittens with embroidered initials (in Helgeland Museum). Old Fishermen`s Mittens hanging in a boat-house on the Lovund island. Photographs 1, 2 & 3: Mette Gårdvik

**Figure 3.** A selection of mittens knitted during the LiLa School 2021. Photograph: Mette Gårdvik



landscape concerns the wellbeing, enjoyment and ownership of a good pair of knitted woollen mittens, and especially the process of making them. The nature, the materials, the technique and the tools, and the simplicity of making a functional object of only some yarn and knitting needles, creates a holistic approach to my own private *taskscape* (Ingold, 1993).

It combines the beauty, the tradition and the contemporary of the Arctic together. We carry them in our hands, affecting our doing in the wintertime which, as you tell us, has been taken into account in making the appropriate mittens for the fishermen. (participant).

### *ABE 2. Grass Shoes – A Walk in Landscapes, Karin Stoll (2021)*

This art-based expression, both the product and visual essay, highlights the cultural sense of sustainability, where the biological diversity of the landscapes represents natural materials that has inherent and traded knowledge.

Excerpts from the visual essay:

As a four-year-old girl living in Bavaria, Southern Germany, I often wore my grandmother's slippers made of grass. I loved the shoes and the smell that reminded me of summer. Later, I realised that these were shoes people could make themselves using free materials from nature.

The tradition of using natural materials such as bark or grass to make daily life utensils and equipment is no longer visible in modern societies in Southern Germany, and much crafting knowledge related to this is gone. As a biologist, I have gradually become more aware of the importance of taking care of materials and older, inherited knowledge as a part of the landscape around us. In my movement between cultures from Southern Germany to Northern Norway, I became aware of how valuable knowledge about using natural materials is. From a cultural sustainability perspective, cultural heritage is one of its main building blocks in developing cultural identity (Friedman, 1994).

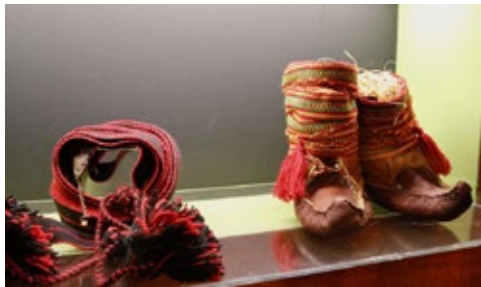
In addition to my childhood memories, I interpreted and decoded pictures of the shoes and watched YouTube videos of the making process (Bayerisches Fernsehen, 2017; Hola, n.d.). For wrapping the grass braid to form the shoes, you need a pair of *shoe lats*. *Shoe lats* were a common part of the households in Helgeland since making “Svart-lugger”, a homemade winter shoe, was a necessity for members of the family.



**Figure 4.** Bavarian Grass Shoes in the Landscape of Helgeland, Northern Norway. Photograph: Karin Stoll.



**Figure 5.** Image series 1, 2. Shoes of the iceman "Ötzi", His shoes consisted of a shell and sole of bear and deer skin, a skeleton of linden bark and dried grass and sedges that were used as insulation (Image 1) (O'Sullivan et al., 2016), something we also know from traditional Sami shoes, called Skulls. Photo 1: © Südtiroler Archäologiemuseum. Traditional Sami shoes, Skulls. Photograph 2: Sara Lien.





**Figure 6.** Image series.  
The Quaking Sedge *Carex  
brizoides* was harvested  
for making mattresses,  
furniture and shoes in  
Bavaria, South Germany  
in the 19th century.  
Photographs:  
Kreisbildarchiv  
Lkr. Augsburg





**Figure 7.** Image series 1, 2, 3. *Carex brizoides*, the quaking sedge is native to Central and Southern Europe. The stem is triangular and thin and can grow up to 40-100 cm long. Photograph 1: J. G. Sturm, Painter: Jacob Sturm. *Carex brizoides* which was traditionally used to make shoes and grows in the forest in South Germany does not exist in Northern Norway, and I had to find an alternative material for making the grass shoes. The Sami people use *Carex rostrata*, the bottle sedge, for insulation in shoes which is native to the Holarctic. Photograph 2: Nordens flora. Cross section of a sedge. Photograph 3: Stefan Lefnaer.

The combination of my natural science knowledge about anatomic and physiological properties of sedges and the practical experiences from working with this material/organism was useful for understanding why sedges are (still) used in shoe making. At a cellular level, the air-filled pockets in the stem tissue will contribute to both isolation and regulation of moisture (Figure 7). Compared with real grass, the sedge stems have no nodes and are smooth and flexible. Therefore, sedges will not break in the braiding process and remain strong enough to make shoes. According to Ingold (1993), my *taskscape* gained experience with, and new knowledge about, my co-dweller, the arctic sedge species *Carex rostrata*, as both an organism and a material to make traditional Bavarian grass shoes. I was not aware about how important these shoes are for my own identity.



**Figure 8.** Image series showing the making process. The whole process of making shoes from grass is a multi-sensory experience: the dried sedge has a light gray-green colour, and at the same time it is smooth and strong and smells fresh, with a hint of lemon. When working with it, it is rustling and feeling like hay. Photographs: Karin Stoll

The meditative way of working and the smell of the rush awoke memories of the warm summer days when I harvested the rush and of my grandmother and her grass shoes. Bavarian grass shoe making in Northern Norway is like walking between cultures and being deeply connected to both of my landscapes.

### **ABE 3. *The Precious Eggs of the Eider Duck, Wenche Sørmo (2021)***

This essay presents the process and reflections on making wooden eggs to help the vulnerable eider duck, which is an important species for the local cultural heritage in Helgeland.

Excerpts from the essay:

I was born and raised on a slightly remote and rural farm which is located at the outlet of a small fjord, called Straumen (the Stream). I was exposed at a young

age to all kinds of nature and landscapes in my local area and being outside was a natural part of everyday life.

Ingold (1993) describes landscape as opposed to *taskscape* and explains what he puts in the term “dwellers”. Being “dwellers” includes all living organisms in the landscape and their activities that contribute to “*taskscape*”, with its sounds, smells, movements and tracks, that can be perceived and which are important as part of the whole of the landscape.

The eider duck is considered a domestic animal along the coast of Helgeland in Northern Norway and for centuries people have guarded nesting eider ducks in order to harvest the down to make duvets and collect eggs to eat. The camouflage coloured female lays 5-6 eggs over a period of one week, before she begins to incubate the eggs



**Figure 9.** The old and worn out wooden egg, made by my father 25 years ago. Photograph: Wenche Sørmo





**Figure 10.** Image series 1, 2. The eider duck female incubating her eggs in the perfect nesting place under my saw mill. Photograph 1: Wenche Sørmo. The laborious work of down cleansing. Photograph 2: Wenche Sørmo

(Figures 2 and 3). When my grandparents bought the farm in 1947, about 160 pairs of eider ducks nested there. They guarded the birds by replacing the first egg with an artificial wooden egg. Since I took over the farm more than 20 years ago, I have been worried about why fewer birds are nesting here. The reason for the decline is said to be a more active and disruptive *taskscape* from the point of view of eider ducks, especially during the vulnerable breeding period (Hanssen & Erikstad, 2012).

The down was harvested after the eider duck had left the nest with the young ducks after 23-25 days of incubation. The female farmers collaborated on cleaning the down after each season (Figure 10, series 2). This was dusty and laborious work, but also a social activity to which they looked forward (Elstad, 2004; Klausen, 2013). The down from 60-70 eider duck nests was needed to make a single duvet, but the result of the hard work was the lightest and warmest down duvets for your own use or to sell. The eider down has unique properties like extraordinary cohesion, elasticity, resilience, “breathability” and temperature-regulating effect that are not found in many other materials (Carlsen, 2013).

The idea for the artwork and making of eider duck eggs emerged when I discovered that I only had one old and worn out wooden eider-duck egg left (Figure 9). As a co-dweller with nesting eider ducks, I feel responsible for helping the birds to succeed in the breeding season. I made copies of eider duck eggs from wood (1: 1 size) and painted them with an environmentally friendly paint. The eggs have a string attached to them with a long nail at the other end, so that the nail can be inserted deep into the nest after I have removed the birds’ first egg.



**Figure 11.** I had the lathe in my workshop at the farm where I also found the piece of wood. I asked my father to help me make some new eggs. My father shows me how to use the lathe to make the new wooden eggs. Photograph: Wenche Sørmo



**Figure 12.** Image series 1, 2. The wooden eggs in an eider-ducks nest. Photograph 1: Wenche Sørmo. Eider ducks nest with authentic eggs. Photograph 2: Thomas Holm Carlsen, Nibio. <https://www.nibio.no/nyheter/rfuglevokterne-er-naturens-vaktmestere>



The process of making new wooden eggs demonstrates the necessity of repeating the *taskscape*s of different generations living in the same landscape at different times (Figures 9, 11, 12). The eider ducks are the same and have the same needs as they did 74 years ago when my family moved to this coastal farm in Helgeland. People also have the same basic needs, but have changed their ways of living by making life more easy and comfortable for themselves, at the expense of other species. It feels somehow good to help a fellow dweller, but I worry about the future for sea birds.

I harvest a valuable natural product that, in the long run, can be used in a locally produced down duvet which can be passed on to the next generation. With my knowledge about the species and my *taskscape* tradition of caring for the eider ducks, together with the trade skills in crafting wooden eggs, I can contribute to pass on the local cultural heritage. My contribution as a dweller will hopefully help maintain the *taskscape* that has been present on my farm for centuries.

## Discussion

### *The Eco-culture of Landscape*

During LiLa (2021), we were inspired by Ingold's (1993) article about the temporality of the landscape, working in our own landscapes that have changed with the concept of the *taskscape*. Tim Ingold's (1993, 2020a) understanding of *taskscape*, dwelling/co-dwelling provided guidelines for participants' choice of content related to their relationship to their own daily landscape. We see variation in the use of art forms, but common is the reflection on the landscape, its temporality, its significance as a bearer of knowledge and an understanding of identity and belonging. *Taskscape*s were culturally rooted in coastal culture and linked to different cultures and craft traditions. A post-humanist discourse that was expressed in all the artistic expressions was about how the landscape could be understood through non-human experiences.

From Gårdvik's ABE1 we realise that there are no landscapes without organisms and no organisms without landscapes and we humans are only a small part of this whole. The cultural landscape has an ecological, traditional and cultural significance that is threatened because the material wool has become less valued in the modern and more industrialised world.

In ABE2, Stoll lifts the crafting tradition of grass shoe making and its significance for forging close ties between nature, different cultures and one's own identity in different landscapes.

Sørmo views the eggs and the eider as a biologist in ABE3, and equates humans and the eider as dwellers in a common cultural landscape, where both have utility value for each other in a form of symbiosis. This reflects an eco-centric view of the landscape where the focus on “how nature works” and the interaction between humans and nature is prominent (Cohen (1989) in Sauv , 1996). As a farmer, she is aware of her own role as manager of both the landscape and an important tradition in relation to the eider on the farm where she grew up. The culture of “taking care of” eider ducks is therefore part of her being in the world.

However, the interconnection between ecological and cultural aspect is also intensely and especially visible in our 3 examples. An interdisciplinary view of both organisms and material and how these characterise our connection to landscape were important messages in the art-based expressions, to overcome the divisions between culture and nature as well as human and non-human. In this way, rooted in a post-humanistic and new-materialistic way of exploring, learning and thinking (Barad, 2003; Friedmann, 1994; Ingold, 1993), we show how we constructed knowledge through making and inspired discussions and cooperation across generations in our different landscapes. The experience of the landscape as a *taskscape* where the dwellers live their lives and perform their tasks can be linked to Ingold’s (2020a) description of the landscape as an inter-connection between cultural and ecological aspects where scientific and cultural forms of knowledge. We gained a deeper insight into eco-culture of the subarctic landscape.

### *Materials and Eco-cultural Sustainability*

The focus on knowledge of the natural materials, to understand how and why they can be used to strengthen our presence, is visible in all of the ABE’s. The non-anthropocentric philosopher Abram (1997), said that “ We must expand our values and our moral considerations to include the non-human world” (in Jakobsen, 2016). The materials were used with respect and caution, something also the eco-philosopher Arne N ss, (1991) was concerned with, and they can be seen as natural materials or organisms, but also as cultural material or culture carriers:

ABE 1: Wool from sheep to make the traditional Fishermen’s Mittens that will keep us warm under changing weather conditions during fisheries.

ABE 2: Sedges of the same species as those used inside Sami shoes were harvested, processed and braided. Shoes, based on traditions from Bayern in Germany, were made.

ABE 3: Wood from local birch were turned on a lathe and made into artificial eider-duck eggs to sustain a herding tradition caring for the duck when her eggs are vulnerable to predators. The tradition is from Helgeland, Northern Norway, in order to get valuable eider down.

All materials used in the production of the art-based expressions were sourced from the local environment from Norwegian sheep, wetlands and birch forests respectively, and were sustainable in the sense that they were renewable and that they can break down and re-enter an ecological cycle when they are worn out. The scientific perspective was explored to gain understanding of both organisms that contributed to the material and the properties of the material themselves. Through this process, we got to know how and why it has been used to help us adapt to living in the northern regions and become a part our cultural heritage.

The sustainable approach and understanding of material is especially evident in excerpts from Stolls visual essay, about the grass shoes in ABE2, and in Gårdvik's visual essay in ABE1, which deals with mittens made from wool. Both discuss the importance of the knowledge of the materials, but also the importance of the craft traditions in a cultural and northern perspective and, importantly, also in a cultural landscape perspective. This is an example of the cultural perspective of sustainability that deals with identity, culture, housing, traditions, wellbeing and also a conservation of the cultural environment and local cultural traditions (Härkönen et al., 2018; Stoltenberg, 2020/2010; Soini & Dessein, 2016).

Goldsworthy (2004) states that “you need to shake hands with the material to fully understand it”, and our interpretation is that it is important to include the sensual perception of both material and the nature in your artistic work. However, in our ABEs, natural science knowledge was also an important part of our understanding of the material. This was something Stoll experienced working with different sedges making her Nordic version of southern German grass shoes in ABE2. She had to take a deep dive into both Nordic and Southern German traditions and cultural history, and the synthesis of this knowledge was important to be able to understand and use sedge as a material correctly. Different sedges have intuitively been used in different cultures. As a biologist, she knew where they grew in the Nordic landscape and that they were used due their insulating properties. In order to understand why this plant has insulating properties, it is necessary to have scientific knowledge about the plant's physiology and about its habitat in the humid and marshy landscapes. In ABE 2, it was clear that a sensual approach to the material was not sufficient to fully understand the plant's properties, but that both a sci-

entific and traditional Northerner knowledge also had significance. In this context, both the scientific and traditional knowledge was absolutely central.

In addition to knowledge of the material wool with its insulating properties, even in the wet state, Gårdvik (APE1) goes into the role the Fisherman`s Mitten has, both in a traditional and historical context, as part of her genuine interest. Wool as a material is lifted as being important for survival in our Arctic and sub-Arctic habitats. The eco-cultural perspective emerges strongly in this project and is made visible in the meeting between wool, sheep and “coastal heath”, a type of cultural landscape that we find on the coast of Helgeland in Northern Norway. Wool was a valuable material, and the knowledge of how wool could be used was central in relation to survival, traffic and trade. As a result of the sheep grazing, the landscape form “coastal heath” is a man-made ecosystem that is also of great importance for the development of many different organisms and for our well-being and belonging.

Sørmo does not go into the eider down as an insulating material or in the material birch as a starting point for the artificial eider eggs in ABE3, but has placed most emphasis on the relationship with the eider and its challenges, which was the background for the production of the artificial wooden eggs. The use of wooden eggs was an important part of the tradition in egg and down production on the Helgeland coast, and the knowledge of which materials and tools were suitable for making artificial eggs was transferred from father to daughter. The eider ducks are highlighted as co-dwellers and their place in both the natural landscape (in the ecosystem), but also in the culture-based landscape. The traded and tacit knowledge is passed on from father to daughter to maintain the tradition of caring for the eider. This is an example of the transfer of Northern Knowledge (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a; 2020b; Jokela et al., 2021), which helps to strengthen the belonging to the landscape. Although the end product in this context appears as an artistic expression, it is clear that the scientific knowledge about the behaviour of the eider ducks is important. Knowledge of egg colour as a physiological adaptation to the place, knowledge of predators and the ecological interaction between organisms in the landscape must be in place in order to take care of the eider ducks so that they succeed in reproduction. It becomes clear that the eider ducks are of great importance to the maker of the project, because she has grown up in this culture and with this tradition as part of her understanding of the landscape.

ABE 1-3 reflect a new-materialist way of thinking and show how one can construct knowledge through making, where natural materials are examined in a more culturally sustainable perspective and represent the biological diversity in the landscape. In this

perspective, the natural materials are lifted, which intrinsically have inherent properties that will be useful to pass on to future generations in the form of traded knowledge. At an overall level, the ABE's appear as a deeper reflection on the movement between man's place in nature and nature's significance for culture and tradition and is rooted in a post-humanist paradigm (Illeris, 2017). The significance of this is culturally constructed (Ingold, 2020a, p. 15), with a focus on eco-cultural sustainability (Härkönen et al., 2018; Stoltenberg, 2020/2010; Soini & Dessein, 2016).

Artistic ways of expression can help to raise issues related to sustainability in the Arctic, both of a cultural or ecological nature (Jokela & Härkönen, 2021). In this way an artistic expression about these issues reaches a different and wider audience than a scientific article. The expression can have a greater role as a carrier of culture and contribute to the spectator becoming aware of the challenge and wanting to be part of the solution. In light of this, it may be interesting to compare how people with different professional backgrounds understand landscape, *taskscape* and dwellers (Ingold, 2020a). They are important contributions since they describe the impacts when nature is viewed through cultural and art-based aspects (Jokela & Härkönen, 2021).

## Conclusion

Cultural heritage and traditional handicraft were explored through sharing and using existing knowledge, and by passing it down in our present. All projects were carried out in the Nordic Arctic landscape, where the interplay between cultural and ecological aspects is closely linked. The concept of Northern knowledge (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a; 2020b; Jokela et al., 2021) was expressed in the projects in the sense that knowledge of landscape, material and eco-culture is required in order to have a comfortable life as a northern dweller. The sensory situated understanding and knowledge communication through organisms, materials and cultures clearly emerges in images and text, something that Ingold (2020b) emphasised as a prerequisite within the context of a direct perceptual engagement with our environment. The ABEs show how important it is to have a holistic approach to knowledge, especially as related to sustainable developmental issues, which in themselves are very complex. Artistic expression is thus important for highlighting the major issues that require approaches from many perspectives in order to be understood more holistically. Compounding of the dichotomies between humanity and nature (Ingold, 2020b) is crucial to focus on the major sustainability challenges in our Arctic and subarctic regions.



In LiLa, the focus was on eco-culture as an interdisciplinary foundation part with participants from various disciplines. The different professional backgrounds were clear in the ABEs and constituted a synthesis of the art and science, culture and environmental perspectives. This enriched the view of the Arctic landscape and eliminated the distance between the subjects. Scientific knowledge of species and organisms proved to be important in order to understand a material, a culture or a tradition in its entirety. In this way, the natural sciences, with their post-humanist roots, contributed to the understanding of new-materialist thinking within the arts.

The manuscript was translated to English by Gary Hoffman

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# Forest Encounters: Communication with Trees, Stones and Powers of Nature

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**P**articipating in arts activities is claimed to increase health and well-being (Laitinen, 2020; Stickley & Clift, 2017), and nature is augmented to be a source of positive health (Capaldi et al., 2014; Tyrväinen et al., 2014). We sought to create a synergy of impacts of arts and nature, and carried out research to develop arts-based methods for enhancing communication with trees, and natural landscapes, for better well-being. Our research is both motivated and characterized by the need to implement new strategies that help reduce the stress caused by modern life and global environmental and societal conflicts with regard to on-going exploitation and destruction of forests and woodlands in the Arctic; and as a consequence, to help increase eco-awareness and appreciation of nature. Motivated by research on health and well-being, we aimed to create a synergy with nature, through combining applied art and spiritual practices with respect to encountering trees and stones through forest mindfulness, environmental art and methods of contemporary druidry that would help contribute towards reforming Arctic art and approaches to comprehending nature (Figure 1).

The research question of this chapter is as follows: In what ways can artistic practices in a mature forest enhance a sense of connection and communication between humans, trees and boulders to help enhance spiritual and emotional well-being? The discussion is framed with the intention of illustrating ways of using druidic and arts-based methods for stress relief and sense of nature-connectedness. In addition, we consider how our spiritual artistic practise and approaches in the forest could help with revitalizing Arctic arts in connection with spiritual experience in nature and to develop ethical guidelines for approaching trees and the natural environments. Druidry is a spiritual practice that promotes relationships between people, landscapes and powers of nature. The analysis followed the principles of arts-based action research (ABAR) (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). A workshop entitled *Encountering Trees and Stones*, was organized as a University of Lapland art course in Vikaköngäs forest, near the city of Rovaniemi, Finland. The participants' artistic and written reflection of their experiences were used as research data.





**Figure 1.** Documentation of the workshop *Encountering Trees and Stones*, 2021. The artwork on the right by Sari George, photographed by Huhmarniemi. The photograph on the left by Francis Joy, 2021.

The workshop *Encountering Trees and Stones* was carried out in the Faculty of Art and Design. It was one of several pilot studies, associated with ‘forest encounters,’ as part of a wider research project called *Forest Ecosystem Services for Creative Industries* (2021–2022) arranged within the Faculty of Arts in the University of Lapland. This project fostered collaborative design, pilots and evaluation of arts-based services in forest environments through co-creation by artists, creative experts and entrepreneurs in the tourism, welfare and care sectors (Jokela & Stöckell, 2022). The workshop ‘encountering trees and stones’ was a collaboration between human participants and powers of trees and stones in a forest. Francis Joy, a druid, designed the spiritual practices, and Maria Huhmarniemi arranged the environmental art activities. The third educator was Carita Sammalniemi who has been developing forest-mindfulness approach in Lapland. The

participants were art students from the University of Lapland, whose aims were to learn how to enhance their sensitivity towards nature and ways to support one's well-being through communication with trees and stones. Henceforth, for them to discover through personal experience, ways in which human persons can receive spiritual nourishment from nature through tapping into the individual powers that resides within their different so called elements that are connected with earth, air, fire, and water for example.

Transformative pedagogies (Lin & Oxford, 2011; Salonen & Siirilä, 2019) encourage learners to enhance their awareness, empathy, compassion and empowerment. In this study, arts-based approaches, combined with spiritual and mindfulness methods, aimed at transformation that could lead into more humble lifestyles and growing awareness of the need for better sustainable lifeways. Desired transformation in our case was in recognition of self as a part of nature and therefore, connected with and accepting of Arctic cultural heritage rather than rejecting it because of colonialization and fear.

## Participatory art and Dialogical Aesthetics for Connectedness

In the workshop *Encountering Trees and Stones* the emphasis on reforming Arctic art was based on the intentions of revitalising spiritual traditions for contemporary needs and redefine arts without the canon of modern Western art that separates art from spirituality (Hansen, 2016). The arts practise was also inspired by research on participatory art. For instance, Matarasso (2019) illustrates that participatory art can enable us to express pain, anger and hope; make friends and find allies; imagine alternatives; share feelings; and be accepted. In participatory art, artists act as enablers of connectedness more than artisans. In the 1990s, participatory art focused on human communities, but in the 2000s, there was a shift towards considering elements of non-human nature as participants, audiences and collaborators (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). Thus, interspecies communication and collaboration allow humans to expand into deep connectedness with non-human agencies. In the workshop *Encountering Trees and Stones* the community of arts was understood as humans, trees, stones and powers of nature.

Strong human and other-than-human-nature interaction and connectedness is typical in Northern communities throughout the Arctic region. Many Northern cultures and communities have retained animistic characteristics in their societies, on the side of other religions. Finnish cultural heritage contains many beliefs about local spirits, residing and acting in the wilderness and on rural regions (Björkman, 2021; Joy, 2021), as they are in many other cultures in which people live close to nature and therefore,

have much value. For example, belief in a female forest spirit as the active agent shows how the forest itself is the active agent: legends reinforce the danger of getting lost in a forest (Kuusela, 2020). The spiritual knowledge and practice shared in the workshops have a universal essence, while also being part of the cultural heritage of Finland and the wider Nordic region. Groves of trees and unusual boulder formations have been revered for thousands of years as being sacred. They have been considered to hold supernatural powers, and the oral traditions and cultural narratives associated with them speak of these powers (Hautala, 1965; Kovalainen & Seppo, 2014).

Capaldi et al. (2014) claimed that contact with nature can improve mood, cognition and health and that a subjective nature connection enhances feelings of happiness and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. When comparing nature's impact on well-being in urban parks, extensively managed urban woodlands and mature forests, the perceived restorative effect, feelings of vigour and subjective recovery were found to be stronger in the forest environment than in urban parks (Simkin et al., 2020). Thus, the forest environment in Vikaköngäs was an ideal place for implementing dialogical aesthetics in nature with the aim of enhancing well-being and experiential capacities. The approach, in relation to enhancing well-being through artistic activities in nature, has been previously studied in the context of arts-based environmental education (Raatikainen et al., 2020; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021).

In connection with interacting and re-evaluating relations with trees, the values linked with ecological knowledge and nature as sources of healing have been studied in health care. These have long been associated with Indigenous cultures and artists to the extent that researchers have proposed learning from Indigenous cultures because of their wisdom (Demos, 2016; Flynn & Reed, 2019). In our case, the methods experimented with by us were not based specifically on Indigenous culture, but on a wider field of spiritual knowledge of trees evident in many cultures globally (Tully, 2018). The phenomena of interspecies social relations can be defined as nature religion or universal shamanism, which involves dialogue with supernatural beings characterised by a spiritual journey to other worlds (Tully & Crooks, 2015).

## **Bridging arts and Spirituality to Decolonized Arctic Arts**

While dualistic Western culture divides art, design and crafts into separate disciplines, the research on Arctic arts argues that these are inseparable from ecoculture (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). Discussions about the need for decolonisation of the North-

ern parts of the Nordic region are ongoing. The demand stems from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, while governmental power is located outside these regions. The concept of decolonising the mind commonly refers to empowerment and to the ability to understand and write one's history (Smith, 1999). Arts have a role in decolonialisation as a source of empowerment and a tool to represent one's own history and culture. In our research, the attempt to decolonise the mind can be understood differently as an effort to revitalise human dialogue with trees and nature spirits, practices that are grounded in respect for nature.

In traditional Arctic cultural heritage, dancing, singing, drumming and performative rites were practised as forms of spiritual exercise. Forbidding the use of drums and shamanism because of Nordic colonisation, has led into loss of cultural heritage. In addition, the view of arts has been influenced by Western dualism and modernism that separated art from spirituality and attributed it to non-Western art and to the field of anthropology (Hansen, 2016; Phillips, 1994). Indigenous contemporary art has reintroduced spirituality in art (Hansen, 2016).

The use of drums and interactions and communication with other life forms such as old trees within forests and sacred stones was seen as paganism in the sixteenth century and therefore, being against both the power and authority of the Church and Nations State of Sweden to which Finland was a part of at this time was strictly forbidden. The use of drums and petitioning to the powers of nature for help and assistance with everyday matters was considered heresy and the practice of sorcery. Therefore, these beliefs practices went underground so that the fragments of the cultural heritage survived. It is only recently that people in the Nordic countries have openly dared to freely strike up communication and interaction with the local powers within nature in Lapland now the grip of colonialism has been loosened, especially when it involves drum use (Fonneland 2017).

When becoming conscious of the benefits of the aforementioned approaches means they can be used in order to rebuild and construct bridges between the human being and trees kingdoms. These bridges were earlier destroyed because of relationships with trees were considered as paganism and thus them losing their sacredness (Joy, 2021; Kovalainen & Seppo, 2014).

## **Forest Encounters as ABAR Interventions**

An ABAR approach consists of cycles of goal setting, conducted through art-based interventions and then analysing and presenting the results via research publications and





**Figure 2.** *The drum is used to establish connections with the forest landscapes when in applied participatory art. Photograph: Touko Hujanen, 2020.*

artistic productions (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018; Jokela, 2019). Several parallel and overlapping research cycles influenced the design of this research on encounters with trees and stones for well-being. Joy has recently published results of long-term practise in two books containing 100 poems in each (2021a and 2022), which combines photographs with nature poetry, magical verses and thinking. Huhmarniemi has been working with the topic of trees and forest in installation art (Huhmarniemi, 2021a, 2021b) and studied cultural revitalisation through Arctic art (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). Joy and Huhmarniemi have also collaborated in developing participatory art with trees. The activity with trees and stones was a continuation of collaboration between Huhmarniemi and Joy in developing decolonial Arctic art approaches in connection with communication between trees, powers of nature and human participants (Figure2). Thus, the research cycle presented in this chapter, is rooted on preliminary research cycles.

Evaluation of practise, the intervention of ABAR, is commonly based on documentation and participants interviews or reflections. We had ten participants in the *Encountering Trees and Stones* workshop. The participatory workshop took place on two Saturdays in September and October 2021. Then, participants independently reflected on their experiences. Students were asked to reflect and illustrate on their connections and communication with trees and stones through drawing, painting, photography or other creative ways, and to write a short text about their experiences. Our research data included documentary photos of the workshop, our research diaries, and participants' artistic reflections, such as paintings and drawings, made after their experiential encounters with trees and stones.

Many ethical considerations were included in the preliminary planning phase of the workshop and when piloting and evaluating the practice. As an ethical consideration, human interactions with other-than-human nature aimed to enhance hope and well-being and foster capacities for environmentalism. Furthermore, issues surrounding decolonising research practices in connection with cultural heritage and environmentalism were discussed by the authors along with ethics.

Development of this approach to nature is one of the fundamental ways of giving recognition to trees as sentient beings and therefore, is the basis for creating a standard of conduct based on respect for nature and a pre-requisite for finding and maintaining balance and well-being because trees are central for our survival on earth. (Joy, 2021).

ABAR is often collaborative. The *Encountering Trees and Stones* workshop was part of the research project *Forest Ecosystem Services for Creative Industries* (Jokela & Stöckell, 2022) in the University of Lapland. Artist-research peers also piloted arts-based activities in forests, and experiences were discussed together and presented in a joint exhibition. Thus, the *Encountering Trees and Stones* workshop was also one of the many ABAR interventions carried out in the same semester with university students, artists and representatives of enterprises. The overall aim of the research was to develop arts-based methods linked to cultural ecosystem services for creative enterprises in the province of Lapland in Finland. The potential value of cultural ecosystem services was derived from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2015):

Spiritual and cultural values of ecosystems are as important as other services for many local communities. Human cultures, knowledge systems, religions, herit-



age values, and social interactions have always been influenced and shaped by the nature of the ecosystem and ecosystem conditions in which culture is based. People have benefited in many ways from cultural ecosystem services, including aesthetic enjoyment, recreation, artistic and spiritual fulfilment, and intellectual development (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. 60).

## **The Experiences of Communication and Connectedness with Nature**

Each technique for experimenting with trees and stones was formulated in response to the stresses and challenges associated with modern life, which are something many people have in common, to a greater or lesser degree. In the feedback at the end of the workshops and in the artistic and written reflections submitted after the experiences, participants said that the practices calmed them and that they learnt methods to contact the nourishing powers inherent within trees and boulders when facing stress.

There were two simple methods suggested as preparation. The first concerned explaining and illustrating the following to the group who were open to contact trees for a number of reasons. Two of the main ones being healing and stress relief, and furthermore, receiving answers to questions or seeking guidance (divination). The second was use of the drum as a mediator.

Students were invited to find a suitable setting where they felt comfortable working. From a distance, they were invited to walk around and get a sense or feeling of a particular tree that they felt drawn to. Joy explained how each person could begin the process by rubbing their hands together as a method for stimulating/switching on the energy, which heightens the sensitivity in the hands in a similar way to how one would warm their hands by rubbing them together on a cold day. The exercise helps increase the energy (feeling) within and around the hands, making them more sensitive. This is typically undertaken several meters away from where the trees branches reach out to. Then, participants were invited to hold out their arms and walk slowly towards the tree and to feel for any waves of energy or magnetism where there is a force-field, which might seem to present some kind of slight resistance. This resistance does not mean the tree is indicating you must stay away, it is simply a shift in energy whereby you begin contacting its energy field upon entering into it. If the feeling is one of openness at this point, pause and introduce yourself and who you are and what you need.

After the shift in perception has been made, students were guided to continue walking slowly towards the tree trunk with arms outstretched until they came to its trunk;



**Figure 3.** Participants on their shamanic journey while Joy was drumming. Photograph: Francis Joy, 2021.

meanwhile, noticing the sensations and any changes in energy. Gently, establishing further contact with it by placing their hands either side of the trunk or as best they can if the tree is very old with a large trunk. To follow, they were invited to lean into the tree and become aware of their feet close to its base. Then they turned around and rested/ placed the back of their head and spine against its trunk and relax by taking three deep breaths and then closing their eyes. Many of the participants reported a sense of connection or communication with a tree:

I met one birch, which was not so high, this tree looks kinda friendly. I started to follow the steps from Joy. After a while, certain emotions started to emerge, and I realized that I'm feeling very welcomed because I didn't receive a hug since I

came to Rovaniemi – and now, this tree is hugging me. I feel this tree is hugging me back. I accept, that this tree is trying to say, that I’m perhaps missing close connections and strong friendships from home. I feel very relieved after this exercise – like after a deep conversation. (participant)

To follow, they stated their intent again. If they needed healing because of stress or excessive grief, sadness or other difficult emotions, Joy directed them to offer these to the tree. Also, students were given the option to visualize excessive anger or negative energies draining out through the base of their spine or soles of their feet as they offered them to the earth. This was done with their eyes closed. It was noted by Joy (2021), how trees are great conductors that can help facilitate these processes.

When hugging her, I feel that my family was linked with me through her, which all of us were shoulder by shoulder and the peaceful lady said – “it’s ok, everything will be better”. My head is authorized to feel her heart beating as well as the texture of her warm skin while there was the humid breeze passing around us and the sun was lying on my back. (participant)

Some participants said that they felt sensations, such as warmth or resistance, in their hands when encountering the trees.). One of the ways for establishing communication with trees was by making offerings to the trees with the underlying concept of reciprocity, which meant consciously approaching trees and offering frankincense resin, fruit, rose petals and lavender flowers as a perceived way of both trees and rocks receiving mutual benefit and whereby, students would be helped and gain experience through the act of consciously and respectfully giving to the landscapes so that help might be received. This practise is rooted to tradition of Finnic people to sacrifice to stones and trees (Arukask, 2017; Hautala, 1965), as well as within the druid traditions.

Before Joy guided participants using the shamanic journey, he asked them to examine certain boulders which had been chosen as points of focus in order to establish any possible characteristics which could help them as artists connect with their shapes and forms (Figure 3). The shamanic journey is a technique that was taught whereby, participants learned how to take flight into the realms of nature, lying down with their eyes



**Figure 4.** Xinlei Zhou, *Hugging a tree*, 2021, mixed media. Photo: Xinlei Zhou, 2021.

closed and by opening up their consciousness and visualizing meeting with the inherent powers within stones and trees that are also consciousness forms, as a method for aiding communication. Then, asking the client to relax using breathing techniques. Once comfortable lying down, they were invited, through the help of rhythmic drumming by Joy, to expand their consciousness and to attempt in their own way to strike up communication with the trees and boulders and ask to meet its spiritual essence-form and thus make a petition for healing. This was done by stating one's name and the nature of the issues at hand. From this basis, participants relayed their visual experiences:

I received some visions from the trees, such as images of a staircase, the eye of an owl, a foot and a hand print, and an image of an old woman's gray hair. The feeling was very warm, and enjoyable, maybe because I was already familiar with tree hugging. I had even sometimes asked questions from trees. I personally have a very close relationship with pine trees. (participant)

Once settled, the participants were invited to experiment by using their imaginary and intuitive faculties as a method for interacting with the trees and boulders in a manner that allowed them to use their senses and also the power of the faculty of the mind and imagination by allowing images and symbolism to emerge as a way of helping to enhance creativity and go beyond the rational, logical thinking and worldview. The appearance of symbolism in the minds-eye can be seen as a sure form of communication. For example, in shamanism, using imagination is a core and central concept of the spiritual practice which helps facilitate in transformation of consciousness and emotional states that are difficult or challenging (Joy, 2018). Therefore, allowing a person to transcend or rise above or descend below being stuck or feeling trapped, frozen or limited. Thus, allowing new innovations to emerge perhaps as spiritual experiences. Recording such experiences as well as transforming them into art as a way of going beyond certain difficult realities. Participants illustrated the visual images in the shamanistic journey in the forest and later through many forms of artistic expression (Figure 4).

## Value for Well-being and Arctic Arts

The purpose of using druidic approaches and arts-based methods for stress relief and relaxation was to allow the participants to get a sense of their own place within nature with an overall focus of helping participants to better understand how important nature is concerning well-being and maintaining good health and how these nourishing powers





**Figure 5.** *Autumn colours influenced to the experiences. Photographs: Huhmarniemi 2021.*

can be accessed to help with understanding this as well as developing relationships. One of both the benefits and advantages of undertaking exercises of this nature in the forest at this time of the year was the abundance of colours on the forest floor, which were like a carpet except these were all natural, with no synthetic dyes. Therefore, this approach was at this time of the year an important part of the methodology because it supported environmental art practice and the work regarding the quest for transformation and also helped illuminate the working areas, which in September were basked in the soft autumn sunshine, which furthermore, added shades, hues and colours (Figure 5).

Our analyses of the experiences in the encountering trees and stones workshop made the spiritual value and nourishment of the forest ecosystems evident. Ecosystem services as a concept can help raise awareness of the value of natural ecosystems, for example, mature forests as carbon sinks and sources of health and rich biodiversity. Ecosystem



services include the aesthetic and spiritual values of ecosystems (Cooper et al., 2016) and provide possibilities for continuing and revitalising ecocultures and nature religions through relationship development. Non-material benefits obtained through spiritual enrichment, self-growth, self-identification, self–other integration, reflection and stress release were evident in the cultural ecosystems’ services of a mature forest, as experienced in the encountering trees and stones workshop.

Guiding the participants towards different ways of connecting with trees allowed them to comprehend how a forest has different types of values. As many researchers have noted, spiritual experiences in nature have the potential to enhance human–nature connectedness (Lumber et al., 2017; Richardson et al., 2017). When designing and piloting the experiment, we learned and helped solidify important and refreshing ways to create communication between humans and trees through our practises. When analysing the experiences in the workshops, we noted that artistic and spiritual encounters in a forest impacted well-being in different ways through a connection and communication within trees and stones. Artistic expressions continued the pedagogical, transformative approach.

In the context of Arctic arts, a revitalisation of cultural traditions and Northern knowledge has been found to be important for cultural resilience environment and culture is changing rapidly due to the environmental crises and urbanization (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). Decolonisation in our case targeted views of arts and re-experiencing the status of trees as sentient beings and in what ways relationships can be developed with them to the extent they can be encountered in a different light which far exceeds their economic worth. Therefore, the arts have been found to be a way to help reconstitute heritage, albeit through new reasons and circumstances. Some participants in our workshops said that they experienced cultural continuation in their encounters with mature trees, meaning they felt they had reconnected with the ways of their ancestors.

Dancing, singing, drumming and performative rites were practised as forms of spiritual exercises and focus before colonisation of the Nordic countries took hold between the sixteenth and 20th centuries. Much of this reverence took place around trees because of their inherent spiritual values. Our approach of encountering trees and stones revitalised a view of the arts in which priority is not given to institutional objective-orientated art but to encounters and dialogues between human and non-human powers, using fresh perspectives as has been demonstrated. In the assessment, the view of participatory art included spiritual practice in a similar sense that the shamanistic healing tradition can be seen in intersections of arts-based methods (dance, drumming,

visualization) and spirituality. The role of artists (including druids) as facilitators of experience is also rooted in this tradition. Decolonizing processes fostered in the research included allowing the practice of communicating with powers of nature, using drums and re-thinking arts without Western modernistic mindset.

The study, as a small-scale experiment, has value for the continuous development of the theory and practice for post-humanistic participatory art, arts-based methods and transformative education through arts and spirituality. The value and potential implication of the methods experimented with in the study are associated with creating an opportunity for opening up communication with other life-forms, facilitating healing and restoring capacities. Further research is needed on their usability, for example, in green care activities, community arts and transformative and decolonial pedagogy. On the other hand, we noted it being bizarre that structures of economy are important to the extent that to help and protect nature there has to be a profit made by companies through doing so, even spirituality. Capitalist thinking and approaches underlie the decay of nature because of disregarding the notions of how trees and forests have their own identities and personalities that can have an impact upon human consciousness in terms of how trees are willing to share their powers, bring healing, nourishment and transformation if approached with respect (Joy, 2021, 2022).

From our experience, there is no one arts-based and druidic method or set-way concerning how to work with trees. However, the one rule that needs to be observed is that of reciprocity for revitalizing and developing relationships with nature. In the case of trees, it is important they be approached slowly, consciously and respectfully, as is the case for beginning and maintaining any kind of relationship. (Joy, 2021, 2022). Therefore, with a clear intent, communication with trees and the natural landscapes is much more likely to happen in some way using an ethical approach as such in order to create a respectful-ethical foundation upon which to work. The benefits of using such approaches towards this work can help individuals awaken to a greater understanding of reality, which has always been there, but for most it is invisible and thus, unknown. This reality is expansive and has many layers to it. Engaging with these different planes can have a profound effect upon one's life and initiate new forms of dialogue (Joy, 2021). Artists and educators need further research on methods that combine arts and spiritual practises.

As Snellman (2018) noted, affective experiences, such as new sensations and experiences in oneself, others and the environment, may form a force opposite society's need for control. In the study, one result that can be seen is the decolonising of the mind from dominant religious (Christian) and non-religious cultures. Bringing this work into the

twenty first century allows the modernistic and capitalistic stereotypes about trees to be swept aside for new approaches and methods to be implemented and subsequently used for communicating with trees that are free from accustoming such practices that have earlier been tied to negativity and fear.

## Conclusion

The study combined research in participatory art, education and Arctic arts. The research aimed to develop arts-based methods for enhancing communication with trees, and natural landscapes, and improving well-being. Participatory art fostered connection and communication between human subjects and powers of nature by various artistic, spiritual and mindfulness exercises. How participants were guided into dialogue with trees, thus widening their comprehension of interspecies communication, produced interesting results. Henceforth, reflecting a positive influence on their sense of well-being, nourishment and a transformation in their renewed comprehension of an expanded community to include trees, forest and nature spirits/powers. Analysis our experience and research data indicate that expanding communication and sense of community between humans and powers of nature provides a sense of integrity, new values and connection with what can feel like something greater than human limitations. The value and potential implications of the methods arts-based forest encounters are associated with facilitating healing and creating an opportunity for opening up communication with other life-forms. Broader-additional research that follows systematic and replicable qualitative methods as well as artistic research that promotes the creation of new ways of acting and thinking are needed on these within the contexts of Arctic art, green care and pedagogical methods.

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# Art-Based Insights into the Relationship Between the Lapland Cow, Humans and Northern Nature

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In this chapter, I examine the Lapland Cow's past and present interactions with its farmers through art-based research. The visual realisation of this process is the exhibition *Meän lapinlehmä (The Lapland Cow and Us)*, which I prepared for the Rovaniemi Local Heritage Museum for the summer/autumn 2022. In the exhibition I displayed, inspired by prior ethnobiological research, how the northern environment, societal changes and the Lapland Cow's close connection to its farmers have characterised this breed and contributed to its survival. My motivation for this work grew from my concern about the breed's fragile situation, as expressed by its farmers.

An old folktale recounts that when the first people came to Lapland, they were greeted by a Lapland Cow who emerged from a fountain in a forest and fed them its nutritious milk. All the cows born thereafter were descended from this beautiful white cow, as the story goes.

There are similar tales about native cows in other Nordic folklore. The stories are often associated with the water, haze or fog, or, as in the case of Iceland cattle, with geysers. The ancient Saga of Ymir tells that the first living creature was a cow that was born when the worlds of fire and ice met at the beginning of time. The cow fed the primal creature Ymir with its milk and all other creatures thereafter descended from Ymir. The cow was the origin of the world and everything in it. Is there any higher way of venerating the cow? These ontologies, which reflect people's past perceptions of the cow, are hardly remembered in the midst of the material prosperity of our modern lives.

The Lapland Cow – officially, the *Northern Finncattle* – is a native cattle breed in Lapland and northern Finland. It is one of the ancient Scandinavian breeds, together with Icelandic cattle and Swedish and Norwegian mountain cattle (Bläuer et al., 2016; Kantanen et al., 2000). Throughout their long histories – more than a thousand years have passed since their first generations appeared – these native breeds have adapted to the harsh Nordic environment and supported human life and subsistence in various ways.

Arctic native bovines and their keepers have, together, developed sustainable interdependent lifestyles. These lifestyles have almost disappeared, but the native northern

breeds and their sustainable traits are increasingly valued both among researchers and general population as the extinction of species and climate change are accelerating. Until recent years, northern native breeds have been poorly studied, and there has been limited research on the Finnish breeds, such as the Lapland Cow, excluding genetic studies. In general, biological research in the global north has focused on wild animals, or on semi-domestic reindeer, and livestock animals have been unpopular subjects in the humanities. Research on native breeds has increased due to the endangered cultural heritage and traditional knowledge associated with them (Karja & Lilja, 2007). There has also been a rising interest in the domestication and adaptation (Pokharel et al., 2019; Stammler & Takakura, 2010) of native breeds and the joint histories of animals and people, their co-existence and their relationships.

Dairy farming has played an important role in Lapland because the cold climate does not favour the cultivation of grains. The Lapland Cow has been raised in all parts of Lapland, even in its northernmost region, since the Middle Ages (Itkonen, 1948). It was the most common cattle breed in Lapland before WWII and for some time thereafter (Kaltio, 1958), but it almost went extinct in the 1970s, when imported breeds were being farmed for a higher milk yield. The breed's population has slowly increased since the 1980s (Soppela et al., 2018). The Lapland Cow remains an endangered breed, but it is increasingly recognised and valued for its cultural and ecological significance. The aim of the *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition was to draw attention to the Lapland Cow and raise awareness of its uniqueness, its value and its place in cultural heritage. The exhibition also purported to highlight the work of those who raised and maintained this breed in the past and those who do so today.

## Practical Implementation

The site of the *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition was a traditional-style summer barn<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1) located in the near vicinity of the Rovaniemi Local Heritage Museum's residential house and yard. I prepared the exhibition mainly in the spring of 2022, and it was displayed from early June to mid-September. The exhibition was part of the Finnish Local Heritage Days festival held in Rovaniemi on September 9–11, 2022. This event has been organised annually for a broad public in different parts of Finland since 1949.

This chapter and the *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition both draw on my art education studies at the University of Lapland and my previous and ongoing ethnobiological research<sup>2</sup>. I am northerner, born and raised in a small village Lapland. I have been a re-



**Figure 1.** *The site of the exhibition: an old summer barn at Rovaniemi Local Heritage Museum. Photograph: Päivi Soppela, 2022.*

searcher almost all my adult life, more specifically an animal biologist, but I am also an artist. My research on northern animals, humans and livelihoods has been very rewarding but has often taken up all my time and left not much for art. I have long wanted to combine these two sides of my being, the researcher and the artist. While working among Lapland cows and farmers, I became aware and shared their concern about the breed's endangered situation. I felt there was space but also a call for me to act as both a researcher and an artist. The cows' lively personalities and their farmers' everyday struggle to ensure the breed's survival were a major inspiration in this process.

During the past seven years I have contributed to or led several interdisciplinary research or development projects focusing on the Lapland and its farmers in northern Finland (Soppela, 2018, 2019; Soppela et al., 2018; Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017; Soppela & Tuomivaara, 2022). The methods of these projects included surveys and workshops

(Soppela 2018, Soppela et al. 2018), participant observation and interviews with both old-generation farmers (six informants) (Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017) and present-day farmers (30 informants), seminars and group discussions (Soppela et al.<sup>3</sup>; Soppela & Tuomivaara 2022). The interviews were semi-structured, and they were recorded, transcribed and analysed, the latest<sup>3</sup> also thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Except for the latest, ongoing project<sup>3</sup>, the findings from these studies have been reported in various academic papers, popular articles and through Finnish media channels.

During the fieldwork, farmers from both groups expressed their concerns about the Lapland Cow's endangered status and the lack of public appreciation for their work as the cows' keepers. Therefore, the collective aim of these projects has been to increase awareness of the Lapland Cow and to enhance its revival, as well as to empower and garner acknowledgement for its keepers.

The exhibition presented in this chapter, *Meän lapinlehmä*, was a contribution to the broader art-educational project at the University of Lapland, *Arcta Fast Educational Model*. This educational project collaborated with the Rovaniemi Local Heritage Museum and Finnish Local Heritage Days. The goal of the Arcta Fast exhibitions held at the museum was to promote dialogue between the past and present, such as between the museum's traditional exhibits and contemporary art methods. This was also one of the goals of the *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition. Its principal goal was to portray, by artistic means, the Lapland Cow and its interrelationships with humans and northern environment for a wide public.

In this process I drew upon the key ideas of contemporary art aiming to connect art with a topical societal-cultural question (Lacy, 1995; Matarasso, 2019) as well as regions and place-specific (Lippard, 1997) approaches. These approaches have been established in art education over the past few decades (Hiltunen, 2010; Martusewicz et al., 2015), often in the context of art education for social and environmental sustainability (Härkönen, 2021; Wagner et al., 2021). My own art-based research is also related to current discussions of *Arctic art*. By using the concept of *Arctic art*, Huhmarniemi and Jokela (2020), Jokela et al., (2019), and Jokela and Huhmarniemi (2021) have pointed out how socio-cultural activities can reflect and renew northern and Arctic cultural heritage or create new artistic forms of expression based on nature, culture and current debates on post-humanism and new materialism.

*Meän lapinlehmä* consisted of two installations (Figures 2-3), a selection of old photographs (Figures 4-7), one new photograph (Figure 8) and a digital soundscape. *Soundscape*, here, refers to a sound recording with the purpose of giving or restoring

the feeling of being in a certain auditory environment. The purpose of the exhibition's soundscape was to endow the barn in which the exhibition was held with the presence of cows and their farmers, and thus to heighten the sensory experience. The recording consisted of the sounds of cows on pastures and inside barns, milkers' calls, the hand-milking process and farmers' comments about the cows. The old photographs portraying Lapland Cows and humans in different everyday situations were collected from the archives of the Provincial Museum of Lapland and other museums, using the Finna database ([www.finna.fi](http://www.finna.fi)). The photos I found were in many cases the only ones of their kind in the archives, and therefore quite rare.

## Theoretical Considerations

In my artistic process, I used my knowledge of the Lapland Cow and its keepers from my prior research and attempted to reflect the findings in my artistic methods and choices. My approaches to the exhibition, both artistic and scientific, are both my orientations in the world and shaped the process. The project's topics are situated between art and other fields of research, such as biology, social sciences and education (Demos, 2017; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). This is characteristic of art-based research, where the topics under examination usually derive from societal or environmental challenges, and art is used as a tool for increasing social awareness and change, and practical and theoretical research are conducted simultaneously (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020; Leavy, 2009).

My art-based research was framed by art education and social and natural sciences connecting cultural heritage and sustainability (Härkönen, 2021), as well as by post-humanist animal studies (Sederholm et al., 2022). Post-humanism emphasises the need to overcome the divide and look for similarities between humans and non-human animals (Shir-Vertesh, 2017). Post-humanist studies have also emphasised that when studying animal husbandry in its social (human) contexts, it is important to recognise animals as social beings in their own right (Orton, 2010). These understandings of human-animal studies are also highlighted in art and art-based research (Johnson, 2021; Sederholm 2022). Furthermore, post-humanist approaches have been implemented in art education practices (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021; Raatikainen et al., 2020).

The theoretical background of prior ethnobiological research builds on contemporary understandings of human-animal-environment relations and their manifestations in human biocultures. These includes not only the direct relationship between the animal and its keeper, but also a variety of dynamic interactions extending from domes-



tication to societal, cultural and political relations between humans and animals, and their shared environment (Anderson et al., 2017; Larson & Fuller, 2014; Stammler & Takakura, 2010). Domesticated animals in post-humanistic studies are seen not merely as ‘objects’ owned by people as property, but also subjects who have social and mutual relationships with people (Knight, 2005; O’Connor, 1997; Oma, 2010; Orton 2010; Stammler & Takakura, 2010). Emotional connection, comfort and care between humans and their animals have also been highlighted (Anderson et al., 2017; Knight, 2005; Salmi et al., 2022). The topic “human-animal relations” is, by nature, interdisciplinary.

I have reflected on these ideas in examining the relationship of the Lapland Cow with its farmers and the significant changes that both have experienced over the past hundred years in Lapland. My aim in conducting art-based research has been to draw public attention to a topical societal issue and to activate peoples’ thinking about this issue. The overarching goal of this kind of research is to revitalise local ecocultures and communities and to increase their capacities to empower and retain cultural pride. This has also been the aim of the University of Lapland’s art, environmental and community studies component of art teacher education since the 1990s (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021).

## The Summer Barn and its “Flow”

I was fortunate to have an authentic site for my exhibition: an old summer barn at the Museum (Figure 1). The building’s architecture is interesting, with its pyramidal roof and lofty inner space. As such, it is a work of art and a piece of the Lapland Cow’s and the people’s shared history in northern Finland. I began preparing for the exhibition by spending time familiarising myself with the barn and contemplating its atmosphere. The barn was initially completely empty, with only some wasp nests high up in the ceiling. This provided a good opportunity to see its structure, plain as it was.

These types of barns were common in northern Finland until the mid-1900s. The cows were gathered there in the evening from the meadows and forests in which they grazed during the day for milking and overnight keeping. The barn was built of thick logs that kept its inner temperature lower than the temperature outside. When the cows returned from the field, their warm bodies and breathing heated the air inside. As soon as the door was closed, the warm air rose towards the ceiling, where it was expelled from a ventilation pipe. This air conditioning also forced any insects out of the barn (Vilkuna, 1961). It is believed that the roof’s pyramidal shape mimics the structure of Sami *lavvo* (*FI: kota*).



**Figure 2.** An overview of the exhibition, with the installation *The passage of time* hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the barn. The cow installation is against the back wall, while the photographs hang from the side walls, each in a separate stall. Photograph: Päivi Soppela, 2022.

The barn's door and walls are very low, but the space opens up remarkably upon entering. It quickly became clear to me that I wanted to highlight the barn's shape and height in my artwork. My first impression was of a stream or a flow extending between the inner space and the ventilation pipe. This idea materialised as stripes of white, slightly transparent fabric hanging from the ventilation pipe in the middle of ceiling (Figure 2). I intended the "flow" installation as a metaphor for the abundance of milk produced by the Lapland Cow, on whom families were deeply dependent in the subsistence households of the past. However, every visitor has her or his own experience and interpretation of the artworks.

Later, when I was more familiar with the architecture and learned about the functional purpose of the roof, I started to see the fabric stream as the flow of air rising towards the pipe. The flow took on a concrete meaning, but also another metaphorical one, in my mind. It reminded me of the shared lives and spirits of the cows and people who occupied the barn in the past and present, and represented the flow of their breath upwards—the air that is in constant movement in this space now as it was in the past, transcending time. Interestingly, the English word "spirit" comes from the Latin *spiritus*,

which means “breath”. The Latin root word *spir* means “breathe”. For a long time, the installation did not have a name, but after these reflections I named it *The passage of time*.

## The Nature of the Lapland Cow

When I moved my installations to the summer barn in June, I was helped by our university’s caretaker. He commented on my cow figure by saying “people have so often found comfort crying their worries against the warm side of a cow”. He was right. The cow has been more than a mere livestock animal to farmers; often, it has been a trusted friend, even a family member. The subject of this relationship with cows has emerged from most, if not all, meetings and interviews with farmers (Soppela, 2019; Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017; Soppela & Tuomivaara, 2022). The cows are understood by farmers to be sentient beings, capable of communication and of having meaningful relationships with people, just as they are understood as persons in post-humanistic concepts (Knight, 2005; Shir-Vertesh, 2017). This understanding of animals as persons is deeply rooted in the cultures of northern and indigenous peoples (Helander-Renvall, 2010; Salmi et al., 2022).

Both the caretaker and I have warm childhood memories of Lapland cows, but there are people in Finland who have never even seen one or heard of the breed. I wanted to introduce the Lapland Cow in the barn, not only visually but also in its real physical dimensions. A cow, even the relatively small Lapland Cow is an impressive creature<sup>4</sup>. Thus, I created a life-sized installation representing a Lapland cow and its calf (Figure 3). The figures were carved from sturdy birch ply and painted white. They could be seen immediately upon entering the barn. The mother’s head faced the door and made eye contact with entering visitors. The calf was approaching the mother.

Making eye contact is characteristic of the Lapland Cow, who is very curious and ready to approach humans. Initially, I had not painted faces on the cows because I had planned to project archival photographs on their surfaces. I realised immediately that it was important for the cow and calf to have faces. The faces were important for making contact with visitors, as this contact represents key animal-human communication and social engagement between humans and domesticated animals (Borgi & Cirulli, 2016; Jardat & Lansade, 2022; Raatikainen et al., 2020). The faces also show that the cow and calf are persons and individuals. I named the cow *Ilo* (Joy), as shown with a sign made of willow twigs beside her.

Lapland cows are usually white, like their mythical ancestors, with a dark muzzle and ears. They are hornless but may have dark dots on white base colour of their hair. When the breeding of the Lapland Cow officially began in the late 1800s, white hides were prioritised (Kaltio, 1958). However, this coloration is probably of very old origin, as there



**Figure 3.** Joy and her calf with flowering fodder plants gathered around midsummer.  
*Photograph: Päivi Soppela, 2022.*

are written records of white, hornless northern cows dating back to the Law of Uppland in 1296 (cited by Kaltio, 1958). The farmers mentioned that white is both beautiful and protects the cows from insects on pastures.

There is also a strong connection between the Lapland Cow and northern natural landscapes. I wanted to make this connection visual and olfactory by enhancing the cow installation with blooming forage plants that I collected from the meadows and placed above the figures for midsummer (Figure 3). I changed the plants a few times over the summer following their growth. The cows and plants have a reciprocal relationship; cows are able to make use of diverse of meadow plants and are, themselves, necessary to the plants' existence and diversity by virtue of their grazing.

### The Cow of Forests and Fells

When Lapland cows, or any cows, are released to summer pastures in the spring, they literally jump for joy. They are true grazers who can feed on a wide range of natural plants and in many kinds of landscapes. One of the old-generation farmers recalled, "I am from the fell landscapes of Eastern Lapland, and there were mire lands too... cows





**Figure 4.** *White northern herd on pastures of the farmhouse Puranen in Pello, Northwestern Lapland (1933). Photograph: J. Westholm, Lusto, Suomen Metsämuseo, Suomen Metsäyhdistyksen kokoelma.*

went there to eat, on soft mires... There were higher lands too, so the cows had to be light; a heavy cow couldn't have managed there at all" (Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017). The small cows, with their light, wide hooves, have no problem moving around.

An old archival photo in the exhibition shows "people and white herd of the North" in Western Lapland on a mire meadow (Figure 4). The photo was presumably taken when people were making hay for the winter while letting their cows graze. People and cows are spread out across the banks of a body of water, seemingly a pond or a fountain, and appear to be enjoying their day.

The picture also suggests an atmosphere of freedom and the connectedness of both cows and people with the landscape (Figure 4). The Lapland Cow is thought to have shared the same environment with people for more than a millennium. This shared life has become connected to the northern landscape, and the landscape, by turn, has become part of their lives. It is often forgotten that animal husbandry is a socio-cultural relationship that has involved from early on not only humans and animals, but also the landscape (Anderson et al., 2017). This is often ignored by modern agricultural production systems. Grazing in different landscapes has maintained the adaptability of native cows to their natural environment and contributed significantly to their health and sustainable characteristics.

It was interesting, even surprising to me, as a reindeer researcher, how many similarities there are between the Lapland Cow and the reindeer, another northern grazer. The reindeer has been adapted to northern conditions much longer than the Lapland Cow has. Nevertheless, there are similar seasonal variations in their food intake, physiology and adaptive traits as in reindeer (Soppela, 2000). Like the reindeer, the Lapland Cow is able to make use of a wide variety of plants in the summer when food is plentiful, and to cope with poor forage in the winter. The farmers mentioned that the Lapland Cow has adapted to scarcity even to the extent that she easily gets too fat when consuming significant quantities of nutritious food (Soppela et al., 2018).

## Milk for the Family

The basic human-cow relationship is utilitarian, as the cows are used for milk production. Milk and other bovine products played an important role in difficult living conditions in the past. The old-generation farmers mentioned in the interviews how important cows were to the household in Lapland's harsh conditions. There were usually only a couple of cows in each family, which made them all the more important (Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017).

The elder farmers emphasised that the milk was particularly important for children, and was something to put on the table when there was a shortage of everything else. There were very few photos showing children with cows in the archives. I was lucky to find a picture of two boys on a milk-fetching trip in northern Lapland in the 1950s (Figure 5). The photographer had managed to capture a lively moment. At that time, most of the dairy cows in northern Finland were still of the Lapland breed. If a family had no cows of its own, it was usually a child's duty to get milk from a neighbouring farmhouse and bring it home.





**Figure 5.** Young boys Esko Keskitalo and Jaakko Angeli returning from a milk-fetching trip in the village of Peltovuoma, Northern Lapland, in July 1956. Photograph: Eero Sauri, JOKA, Journalistinen kuva-arkisto.

The people's gratitude for their cows and their milk was celebrated in the names they gave their cows, such as *Ihme* (Miracle), *Lahja* (Gift) or *Ilo* (Joy). These names were likely influenced by the political leanings and romantic nationalism of the late 1800s, when Finland was under Russian rule and there was a focus on national symbols and property, including native breeds (Kaltio, 1958). However, they also reflect farmers' attitudes towards their cows and the closeness of the relationship between the two.

## Women and the Lapland Cow

The photo of “an unknown woman with her cow” (Figure 6), taken by local photographer Mauno Körkkö, shows the important but much ignored role that women have played in dairy farming (Kaarlenkaski, 2022; Ryd, 2008), including raising the Lapland Cow and preserving the breed in the past and present (Soppela, 2019). This role has been taken for granted to the extent that, until recently, it has not featured much in museum exhibits. In a similar manner, farming in general has not been displayed, even though many other livelihoods, such as fishing, hunting and reindeer herding, have been widely represented. Is this because taking care of the cows has usually been women's work and it has not, until recently, been seen as important, or is it a matter of forgetting Lapland's “poor” agrarian past? In fact, “poverty” of Lapland is a popular, but often not correct, narrative that comes to its resources. Dairy exports played an important role in 1900th century Finland (Mannelin, 1912). Recent research has uncovered that also Lapland, along with other provinces was an important butter producer throughout the 1900th century, and the butter churned in remote Lappish farmhouses and cottages was exported to Scandinavia and even to Germany and the British Empire at that time (E. Perunka, 2022; oral communication). Butter churning was for a long time primarily women's work until it was mechanised and moved to dairies during the next century.

Women's work deserve recognition, and I am happy about the existence of this photo, which, again, was a rarity. The fact is that women took care of the native cows in the past and continue to do so today, although there are currently also more men in this role (Soppela, 2019). The reason why women are taking care of the native breeds may be that they see it better fit to their worldviews or lifestyles than breeding imported breeds. Women also seem to place a great deal of emphasis on close personal contact with the cows and to appreciate their gentle personalities. However, native breeds are raised for many reasons; it is not merely a gender issue.

The cows are social animals and interaction with individuals of their own species is as important for them as interaction with humans. This is equally true of native bovines and commercial breeds. Native breeds are often characterised as more alert, independent and vivid than highly bred bovines. The past and present Lapland Cow farmers in prior studies characterised the cows in much the same way and highlighted their friendly and social nature, their intellect and their learning abilities (Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017). The cows learn from humans but humans also learn from the cows; at least, they learn “how the cow wants to be treated”, one interviewee said in reference to the cows’ high self-esteem.<sup>2</sup>

The farmers said that Lapland cows demand communication from their caretakers and try different ways of getting their attention if they do not initially receive it. I tend to believe that the Lapland Cow’s social nature and ability to create a close relationship with humans has contributed largely to its survival despite its being endangered. A strong human-animal connection may have committed farmers to preserving the breed.



**Figure 6.** *An unknown woman with her Lapland Cow, Rovaniemi (year unknown).  
Photograph: Matti Körkkö, Lapin maakuntamuseon kuva-arkisto.*

Due to their gentle nature and ability to form relationships, Lapland cows are nowadays popular therapy animals. In fact, the animals of the Lapland Cow's heritage herd were, for decades, cared for by the inmates of Pelso Prison in Vaala, Northern Ostrobothnia, as part of their rehabilitation. The prison farm was closed in the autumn of 2022 and the gene bank cows were moved to the school farm of Lappia Vocational College in Tervola, and thereby returned to Lapland after 37 years of absence.

## The Cow That Almost Disappeared

The Lapland Cow was the most common cattle breed in northern Finland until WWII and during the 1950s. The Lapland War (1944–45) interrupted the breed's development abruptly. An archival photo from the time of the war shows a road full of people and



**Figure 7.** People and cows leaving Lapland for evacuation at the beginning of the Lapland War (WWII) in autumn 1944. Photographer unknown, Lapin maakuntamuseon kuva-arkisto.

their cows being evacuated from Lapland (Figure 7). The cows were usually walked to their destinations by young girls and older family members. Many cows were lost during both the evacuation and the war. The herds owned by Sami people in the Upper Lapland were completely lost, as the evacuation of their herds was not arranged in time by the government (Lehtola, 2004). These losses, but also the fortunate survivals, were remembered by old-generation farmers who returned to Lapland and started new lives.

The near-disappearance of the Lapland Cow was due not only to the war and evacuation but also to the rural and agricultural politics of the time. The Lapland Cow was forced to give way to imported breeds that produced more milk, such as the Ayrshire Cow. There was a need to increase food production after the war, and social and technological changes intensified the development of production methods. The old-generation farmers reported that the Lapland Cows and their breeders were despised by other farmers and officials, and the farmers were pressured to abandon the cows. They even had to hide the cows from officers of the agricultural advisory agencies: “It was like a shame, if anyone happened to have those little Lappish cows. They said to me, “you don’t get even a drop of milk to your coffee from them”, one of the farmers recalled (Soppela & Mazzullo, 2017).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the livelihood of raising Lapland cows was challenged by the loss of small farms and peoples’ movement away from the countryside. The breed’s decline was rapid during the 1960s, and its population was at its lowest in the 1970s. The population began to grow slowly during the 1980s, thanks to the work of a few dedicated farmers and veterinarians and the establishment of a gene bank and national revival programs.

## The Lapland Cow Today

Today, the Lapland Cow is reared on a small scale throughout Finland. Farmers usually have a few individuals in addition to other breeds, and herds consisting exclusively of Lapland cows are rare (Soppela et al., 2018).

The last photograph featured in the *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition shows a contemporary farmer, Rami Hiltunen, with his cow Kummi (Figure 8). I chose this picture because it captures the close relationship between the two, but also because it shows the landscape in which Kummi grazes and eats spruce twigs. Rami lets his cows follow their natural behaviour and go to pastures during part of the winter. This is a part of their species’s typical life and an element of respectful care on the farmer’s part. Time spent outdoors is important to maintain the Lapland Cow’s wellbeing and adaptation to the cold climate.



**Figure 8.** Present-day farmer Rami Hiltunen and his Lapland Cow, Kummi, in autumn.  
*Photograph: Päivi Soppela, 2020.*

Rami keeps a couple of Lapland cows as part of his subsistence lifestyle. He also has some hens and a garden, and he produces as much of his own food and as many of his own utilities as possible. There are also many others who raise the Lapland Cow for ecological, ethical and cultural reasons. Most of the farmers would like to increase the number of Lapland cows in their herds, or at least to maintain their current numbers, in order to preserve the breed and its genetic and cultural heritage. At the same time, they struggle with the requirements for intensified production set for dairy farmers by current agricultural policies.

The Lapland Cow is a small cattle breed that cannot compete with other breeds in terms of milk production. However, it can survive due to its sustainable traits and cultural value, as well as by virtue of the quality and locality of its products such as milk, ice-cream and cheese, and of its services like therapy, green care and landscape management. The Lapland Cow is a highly sustainable cattle breed when its native characteris-



tics are taken into account. Its closeness to nature, grazing habits, social bonding abilities and close relationship with humans all play an important role in its sustainability.

## Conclusions

In Norse mythology, the cow was seen as the creator of the universe. Modern society hardly has any contact with farm animals, despite their continued importance. We tend to forget cows and other farm animals, but we still long to connect with them, as evidenced by the popularity of the agricultural events at which we can meet them.

The *Meän lapinlehmä* exhibition foregrounded the close relationship between humans and the Lapland Cow in the past and present, and how this mutual relationship has affected the existence of both in harsh northern conditions. The interconnectedness of people, their cows and nature was a necessity in the past, but it also maintained a delicate, sustainable ecological balance that is lacking today. Both farmers and scholars highlight the need to recognise the significance of native breeds such as the Lapland Cow as companions that have contributed to the wellbeing, culture and resilience of northern societies in the past, and that have the potential to do so in the future. These animals are an important part of northern Finland's cultural heritage and deserve to remain so in the future. Native breeds can show us how to have closer human-animal relationships, teach us respect for farm animals and pave the way to sustainable agricultural policies.

Art education played a contemporary role in *Meän lapinlehmä* by generating a discussion about concern for the Lapland Cow in a public venue and event (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020; Lacy, 1995; Matarasso, 2019) and linking this discussion with art. The topic derived from farmers' concerns as expressed in my field research. There has also been an increasing interest in the Lapland Cow amid a wide public in the development projects I have conducted. *Meän lapinlehmä* used art as a tool to increase interest and social awareness (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020; Leavy, 2009). The exhibition combined art with social and natural sciences in a topic important to both cultural heritage and environmental sustainability (Härkönen, 2021; Wagner et al., 2021). It also contributed to a discussion about the revival of the Lapland Cow and recognised the efforts of its farmers. It appealed to other people in Lapland and to all visitors to take pride in our joint cultural heritage and participate in its revitalisation.

*Meän lapinlehmä* contributed to a discussion around *Arctic art* and its different forms by bringing the topic into a public place, outside a classroom, in the spirit of post-humanism and new materialism (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Jokela et al., 2019).

In producing artworks outside the art world, new forms of art have increasingly emphasised the importance of space, place and site (Lacy, 1995; Lacy, 2008; Lippart, 1997). The heritage museum's summer barn was an authentic venue for *Meän lapinlehmä* and formed an organic whole with the artworks. The barn offered a space for dialogue between the past and present that was central to the topic. The exhibits appealed to multiple senses and encouraged emotional and reflective experiences tied to the visitor's own history and experiences.

The process of mounting the exhibition taught me that art or art-based research is an intentional and conceptual process much in the same way as other disciplines are. However, there was a strong intuitive element in the artistic process, similar to but perhaps stronger than in my other research experience. Intuition is central to the arts; there is, at least, a greater degree of freedom in materialising ideas while combining art with science. I felt the process was holistic. It led me not only to artistic ideas, but also to new perspectives on my prior fieldwork and research. It was inspiring to combine art with science, to work both physically and mentally with the exhibits and explore new concepts and practices.

The outcome of the exhibition is yet to be seen. How did the exhibition manage in reaching its goal, that is, facilitating art-based research and appealing to the audience? Art and art-based research can offer powerful tools for appealing to people and influencing their thinking, and can address animals as a topic of discussion (Johnson, 2021; Raatikainen et al., 2020; Sederholm, 2022). My earlier work has shown me that cows, even their photos, inspire people to spontaneously speak of their own memories of and experiences with cows. This was also the case every time I visited the barn in the summer, and during the Finnish Heritage Days in September. The installations, in particular, inspired discussions.

The story of the Lapland Cow is part of northern cultural heritage and, as such, it is important to make it known to local people. I hope that *Meän lapinlehmä* has played its part in making this possible and drawn attention to the Lapland Cow as a unique, sustainable breed that deserves to be revived and cared for, culturally and socially as much as in terms of keeping livestock.

Altogether, I think that there is a great need for art and art-based research in tackling contemporary questions such as interspecies relations diminishing biodiversity, climate change and globalisation in the Arctic regions, making possible the integration of sensitive qualities of artistic methods into scientific processes, society and interaction of researchers, artists and art educators with local communities.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The summer barn was only used in the summer and in the meantime the empty winter barn was thoroughly cleaned and ventilated. In some areas, an empty barn was used as a summer residence. (page 128)
- 2 Ethnobiological research examines interactions between humans, animals and environment by using methods of ethnography and biology but also other disciplines. (page 128)
- 3 This is a reference to an unpublished manuscript based on the recent interviews conducted by P. Soppela, N. Mazzullo & Tuomivaara, A. in 2022. Lapinlehmän kasvattajien näkemyksiä perinteiden, uusien käytänteiden ja ihmis-eläinsuhteen merkityksestä rodun kasvatuksessa. [How to revive the Lapland Cattle – Farmers' views of the significance of traditions, new practices and human-animal relations]. (pages 130 and 140)
- 4 An average height of the Lapland Cow is 130 cm and body weight 530 kilograms (Faba 2022). (page 134)



# Art-Based Knowing with Sámi Reindeer Herders: A step Towards Resilience

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**T**his chapter covers a visually focused substudy of Korinna Korsström-Magga's art-based research project concerning Sámi reindeer herders' daily lives. The project is an on-going research conducted in reindeer herder cooperatives around Lake Inari in Finnish Lapland, where most reindeer herders are of Sámi ethnicity. The Sámis are the Indigenous people of the northernmost areas (called Sápmi) of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Russian Kola Peninsula. The reindeer herders strive to deal with social and climatic changes currently affecting their livelihood (Tyler et al., 2007).

The Arctic environment and its cultures are changing rapidly. People are moving to the North, bringing in new ways, needs, and demands. Sápmi is an interesting place for many stakeholders and it is providing humanity with unexplored mining areas, forestry, and wildlife tourism. The impact of Western civilization is getting stronger, and old traditions are giving way and blending into a new world (Ford et al., 2020; Freeman, 2000; Nuttall, 2000; Rees et al., 2007). In the field of art education, Indigenous issues have been addressed by Manifold et al. (2019). In the Sámi region of Finland, Hiltunen (2009) has developed methods of community-based art education, and Keskitalo (2010) has pointed out the need for culturally sensitive education reform for Sápmi.

The preservation of minority and Indigenous cultures is a constant and urgent issue. In some regions of Sápmi, it has been possible to retain a strong Sámi cultural and language identity, but in other areas Sámi people have melted into the majority culture. During the history of colonisation of the Arctic, there has been unfortunate oppression against the Indigenous peoples. Today, the understanding and relationship between the Western world and the traditional Sámi cultures has improved a great deal, but according to Lehtola (2015) and Valkonen (2009) considerable gaps in knowledge and understanding about the Sámis remain.

This project presents the contemporary reindeer herders' daily lives visually from their own perspectives. Korsström-Magga's research is conducted using Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) methodologies (Jokela, 2019) by utilizing the *photovoice* research methods used in social sciences (Wang & Burris, 1997) that has similarities with visual

ethnography (Pink, 2013). Korsström-Magga involved five reindeer herder families in capturing photos during their daily lives. Both the Northern Sámi and the Inari Sámi cultures are represented by the families. She instructed them to take snapshots of ordinary daily moments. The photographing task did not seek for beautiful sceneries and pictures of people in their best suits. The aim of the photography was to capture describing moments of their daily life, culture and livelihood. About 1000 photos were taken by the families during one year following their daily chores. The families showed their photographs, with Korsström-Magga's assistance, in a joint exhibition at Siida Sámi Museum in Inari.

The first cycle of Korsström-Magga's ABAR project was completed as a photo exhibition in the Siida Sámi Museum in Autumn 2017 with installations built using items and tools belonging to the reindeer herders' everyday working surroundings. The exhibition was called *Boazoeallin* (in the Northern Sámi language), which means *Reindeer Life* in English. The exhibition process was documented, and reflected on by Korsström-Magga (2019a, 2019b). The exhibition served as a way for reindeer herders to express themselves and explain their reality. The reindeer herders wanted the exhibition to be both informative and enlightening.

In this chapter, the authors discuss how the reindeer herders embraced the photovoice task in their daily lives and how they highlighted particular issues via their photographs and displays.

## Conceptual Framework

Arctic Indigenous cultures are acknowledged as being vulnerable as a result of long-term colonialism and oppression by colonising cultures (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). They are also deemed resilient people, as they have survived and managed to preserve their vivid cultures, including traditions and languages, in spite of oppression and climate change (Ford et al., 2020). These two perspectives stand behind this project and determine the research action to aim for decolonisation and invite the participants to attend as equal co-researchers in their lives.

We use Tim Ingold's (1993) concept of *taskscape* as our framework for examining the photo-installations in the exhibition, expressing the reindeer herder families' everyday lives and culture. In this chapter, the *taskscape* refers to the working environment of the Sámi reindeer herders. Ingold compares the terms landscape and *taskscape*. Both environments are at many levels connected to human involvement, but Ingold stresses that

the landscape is a purely visual experience, whereas the *taskscape* is also connected to other senses, like sounds and movement. For example, the noise of human actions in the environment can be understood as a *taskscape*. The *taskscape* embraces a deeper and wider concept than landscape. Moreover, the *taskscape* is temporary and always changes and is connected to human activities (Ingold, 1993).

Posthumanism sits alongside *taskscape* in our conceptual frame. According to Lummaa and Rojola (2014) is a fundamental idea of posthumanism to stop thinking of ourselves as self-absorbed superiors and accept that we are only one part of a diverse planet. The Sámi worldview and ancient Sámi Indigenous religion includes features that are equal to this idea. Despite the Christianizing of the Sámi people during the 19th century (Lehtola, 2015) the contours of the Indigenous animistic belief remains. According to Helander-Renvall (2010) the Sámi people see themselves as an integral part of nature where the non-humans, e.g. the animals, rocks and plants, possess a soul and are cognizant of their surroundings. She stresses that the dialogue between e.g. the Sámi reindeer herder and their environment, is known to be of benefit to human beings in their daily lives.

Posthumanism raises issues of co-knowing or “knowing with” in the discussion on reform of research methodologies (Braidotti, 2013; Ulmer, 2017). In the North and the Arctic, “knowing with” could be associated with the Indigenous Knowledge System (Kuokkanen, 2000; Smith, 2021). The concept of co-knowing refers in research in an Arctic context not only to the shared knowledge between participating people of the North and the researcher but also to the participating people’s knowledge of and with their environment (Degai & Petrov, 2021; Porsanger & Guttorm, 2011). “Knowing with” (as a posthumanist view) is about the ability to know together with the non-human.

The Sámi reindeer herders are a valuable resource in Arctic research, as they have the knowledge and skills to interpret nature and the reindeer. Stammer and Takamura (2020) describe the reindeer herder’s connection to the reindeer as a concept of symbiotic domesticity that sees humans and animals as equal partners shaping their mutual environment. Porsanger and Guttorm (2011) encountered this in the Sámi Indigenous knowledge (in Northern Sámi called *árbediehtu*). They define *árbediehtu* as inherited collective wisdom and skills gained over centuries that the Sámi people used to enhance their livelihoods.

Features of the Indigenous knowledge system have similarities to the broader category Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and both are passed on by oral traditions such as songs and tales. Berkes (2018) describes the nature of traditional knowledge as qualitative, holistic, intuitive, spiritual and moral. According to Valkonen and Valkonen

(2019) it is community knowledge that is often limited to a specific area, which is why the term local knowledge is also used. They imply that traditional knowledge is dynamic and continually related to time and place, in dialogue, and is affected by other ways of knowing, including the Western scientific model. Today, Sámi Indigenous knowledge is crucial in research about climate change in the Arctic, as it raises specific long-term data of a specific area (Lehtola, 2015; Riseth et al., 2010; Reindeer Herding, 2022).

The Art Education discipline in University of Lapland has long developed place specificity (Jokela et al., 2019), community involvement (Hiltunen, 2010), and support for local cultural awareness and sustainability (Härkönen, 2021). This has in the context of the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD) network contributed to the implementation of the principles of culturally sensitive practices in the context of the European Arctic.

Korsström-Magga's ABAR project is also linked with the current discussion on *Arctic art*. By proposing the concept, Arctic art, Jokela and Huhmarniemi have pointed out how sociocultural activities can reflect and renew Northern and Arctic cultural heritage or create new artistic forms of expression based on nature, culture, and current debates on posthumanism and new materialism (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Jokela et al., 2019).

## Art-Based Research from the Perspective of Co-knowing

Korsström-Magga's research project is based on the (ABAR) methodology, which is one of many approaches under the Art-Based Research (ABR) umbrella. Art education at the University of Lapland has used the ABAR strategy since 1995 to develop participatory working methods in visual art that enable the participants to express themselves and make their own opinions visible (Jokela, 2019; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020). The ABAR approach has increased the interest in using art as a multidisciplinary research method and is currently a strong and long-term part of education for visual art scholars at the University of Lapland (Jokela et al., 2015). In addition, aspects of how contemporary arts-based methods may contribute to decolonising participatory research in the Arctic have generated great interest (Jokela et al., 2015; Seppälä et al., 2021).

Korsström-Magga decided at a very early stage of the research project to use the photovoice method (Hurworth, 2003; Pink, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997) as a participatory tool to produce data based on the reindeer herders' daily lives. It is a useful and practical way to get close to the families' daily lives and to visualise a culture and a livelihood that not many people are familiar with. Also, the fact that the families involved are

multilingual (Sámi- and Finnish-speaking) called for the visual approach. Indeed, some practical situations are better explained with the help of photographs.

Photovoice is a research method developed and promoted by Wang and Burris since 1992 and was initially used in health and social work research. Today, it is well adapted among other fields and often used within participatory art-based action research. The cameras are not entrusted to researchers or professional photographers but are instead given to the subjects themselves in order to entice them to represent day-to-day events via the photos. Wang and Burris (1997) describe the three main goals for photovoice as enabling the community to reflect on their strengths and concerns, to promote critical discussions and knowledge about the community's concerns, and to reach policymakers.

Korsström-Magga uses active participant observation to observe and collect research data. She married a reindeer herder in a small village in Inari County where she has lived for almost 30 years, so she shares the same experiences as the five reindeer families that volunteered for the project. This kind of “knowing with” in the research project helps her focus on the research project, understand cultural and professional terms, and interpret silent knowhow. Korsström-Magga designs, shapes, and facilitates the research process, but the collaboration with the families moulds the research to a mutual process, where every participant is a co-researcher sharing knowledge. In this photovoice project, they act together as a research team, and consent is continually obtained from all of the members of the public contributing to the research data.

### ***Taskscapes of Sámi Reindeer Herder's Contemporary Culture***

Korsström-Magga planned the exhibition in the Siida Sámi Museum in 2017 in collaboration with the five reindeer herder families. Each family presented their photographs combined with items and tools that belonged to the reindeer herders' everyday working surroundings. The combination formed exhibits that had a specific emphasis and represented the families' familiar *taskscapes* of their daily lives. The reindeer was the mutual and driving theme in the families' exhibits, which confirms the strong and special cultural bond between this animal and humans in this environment (Müller-Wille et al., 2006; Stammler & Takamura, 2020). The reindeer were not always presented in the photographs, but the photographs all showed a daily life that was basically connected in some way to a life (and “knowing”) with reindeer.

The photographs that each family had taken, all from their own perspectives, had similarities and followed the Sámi calendar, which divides the year into eight seasons. The winter separations and the early summer earmarking of the small calves were carefully



observed in the families' photographs. Other topics also presented by each family and connected to the Sámi culture, included slaughter of reindeer for meat, hands-on work in the wilderness, and disasters caused by predators. It was obvious that the families shared the same kinds of daily realities and had mutual concerns about their daily lives.

Next, we will discuss the installations in the exhibition and the *taskscape*s that they represent more closely.

### The Fence as an Archetype of a Reindeer Herders' *Taskscape*

Two of the families showed photographs at the exhibition, combined with fences. One family's fence was about 20 m (65 ft) long and 2 m high that had been in use at a reindeer herder's yard. About 300 photographs of the family hang on the fence, as a timeline showing their daily chores along the year (Figure 1). The other family also showed their (approx.) 500 photographs combined with a fence. This fence was part of a separation fence, where the photographs were displayed on a gate where the reindeer were taken in and out from a coral. The visitor could sit on a small sleigh on a reindeer hide and watch the show. White drapery followed the fence for visualising snow, as the separation time is during the winter season (Figure 2).

The other family also showed their (approx.) 500 photographs combined with a fence. This fence was part of a separation fence, where the photographs were displayed on a gate where the reindeer were taken in and out from a coral. The visitor could sit on a small sleigh on a reindeer hide and watch the show. White drapery followed the fence for visualising snow, as the separation time is during the winter season (Figure 2).

The fence has become a mutual *taskscape* for the contemporary reindeer herders in North-Finland, and different kinds of fences could be spotted in many of the families' photographs. The reindeer herder area in Finland is divided by fences into large districts, which the state authorities required reindeer owners to establish from 1898 (Reindeer Herding, 2022). In these large districts the reindeer are grazing free and the reindeer herders are operating together as a kind of cooperative. In addition to the large district fences, there are several separation fences inside each district and additionally, there are fences at home yards where reindeer that need extra care or attention are kept. There are also temporary fences that are built up and used only for a couple of months. A great deal of the contemporary herding work is about building fences and tearing them down. For the herders, especially the separation fence has a great social meaning. Both in winter separation time and also during the calf earmarking in summertime the whole family is

**Figure 1.** The fence along with the about 300 framed photographs turned into an installation at the exhibition.  
Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017.



**Figure 2.** The photographs were displayed as dias at the gap of the door to the coral. The visitor enjoyed the show sitting on a small snowmobile sledge, that is daily in use for transporting goods.  
Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017.



gathering by the fence, including elderly people and small children. Indeed, fences have also a great social meaning in reindeer herders' society. Therefore, the fence is always a part of the daily scenery in some way, and it has great significance as a *taskscape*.

The first family's almost 300 photographs describe their daily lives living in a small village in the middle of Lemmenjoki National Park. Their Sámi culture is vivid and strong, and they have managed to preserve their traditional culture and reindeer herder's knowledge. There are only a few families in the village, and their work with their reindeer is intense. Their reindeer wander free in the area of the national park. The reindeer cows come to the village area in springtime to calf. This unique event can be followed by the villagers from their living room windows. The long-term partnership with the reindeer derives from their early history as Sámi nomads. As Stammler and Takamura (2020) also imply, the reindeer provide not only meat for the herders. The symbiosis of the reindeer and the people living together in their environment is beneficial for both animals and humans. Their pictures showed not only the work with the animals, but also the Sámi's respect for the reindeer as a provider of necessities of life. The Sámi traditional way of respecting life is to honour the animal after its slaughter by using most of it. This family showed proof of their *árbediehtu* (Porsanger & Guttorm, 2011) by showing the best that a reindeer offers, by preparing hides, making shoes and reindeer handicrafts, and wearing hides and other clothing in their daily lives.

The other family that showed their (approx.) 500 photos on the separation fence enlightened the visitor of the contemporary hands-on reindeer herder's work. The main photographer of this family was a young reindeer herder stepping into the adult world. She had the opportunity to capture snapshots of moments in real action in the forest, as well as in the slaughterhouse, and to present the actual daily work of a contemporary reindeer herder at the most hectic moments. The photos also showed how modern techniques complement old ways and traditions in the livelihood of a reindeer herder. The photographic view was realistic and energetic, with great optimism for the future.

### **The Lávvu – a Cultural *Taskscape***

A mother of one of the families wished that her (approx.) 200 photographs should be shown in a *lávvu* (Figure 3).

A *lávvu* is a traditional teepee-shaped tent that serves as a shelter, a resting place, and a place to eat and sleep during contemporary reindeer herding in the wilderness. The visitor at the exhibition was able to enter the dwelling and sit down on a reindeer hide. Soft music and songs in Sámi language in the background embraced the family's photographs, which were shown as slides projected onto a mosquito blanket (Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** *The lavvu, which had been recently in use, spread a pleasant scent of smoke in the exhibition hall. Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017.*

**Figure 4.** *The interior of the lavvu was furnished with typical tools and items that are in use in a lavvu. Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017.*

The theme of the photographs showed the reindeer herders' community working together and the children learning from elders. The photographs show the daily life of a contemporary reindeer herder's home with school-aged children.

The lavvu is a well-known symbol and dwelling in the Sámi reindeer herders' nomad culture. Tourism in the North has turned the lavvu into a romantic fireplace with a Sámi label, which, according to Valkonen (2009), may lead to prejudice and place the Sámi reindeer herders into a cultural trap.

The lavvu remains an important dwelling for the reindeer herders, and it had an important role in the exhibition in correcting misunderstandings. Moreover, its use in a contemporary reindeer herder's life was properly explained. The nomadic way of life ended when the northern Scandinavian country borders were closed beginning in the middle of the 19th century. The lavvus are today mostly used during the earmarking (of reindeer) periods when they are needed as shelter and rest during the many days of work outside in the wilderness. During these moments, the whole family gathers together at the fireplace, eating, talking, and sharing time. To sleep in a lavvu listening to the sounds of nature outside is considered a special treat.



**Figure 5.** The installation focuses on the debate of predators and reindeer herding. Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017.

### **Taskscapes of Confrontation with the World**

The art exhibition also contained two exhibits describing the *taskscapes* of confrontations with other stakeholders. The first installation described the issue of predators. (Figure 5). In the middle was a reindeer skull with antlers. On the left side of the skull was a poster that the family had designed by themselves. It is a graphic view of the economic loss when a reindeer is killed by a predator.

On the other side of the skull was an *agamograph* (a picture made as an optical illusion) that Korsström-Magga had designed of the family's two photographs: one of a living herd with calves and another of a reindeer that is mauled and killed by a predator. The picture of the living herd changed to the killed reindeer when a visitor walked past it (Figure 6).

The exhibit had a severe but true message. The family involved had experienced significant predation by a lynx on their own reindeer herd. This led to painful discussions with defenders of the predators and authorities responsible for wildlife conservation. Thus, the exhibition turned into a political platform.

The second exhibit presented a family's photographs in combination with a sleigh used in reindeer safaris. In the sleigh were typical scenes representing tourism, including





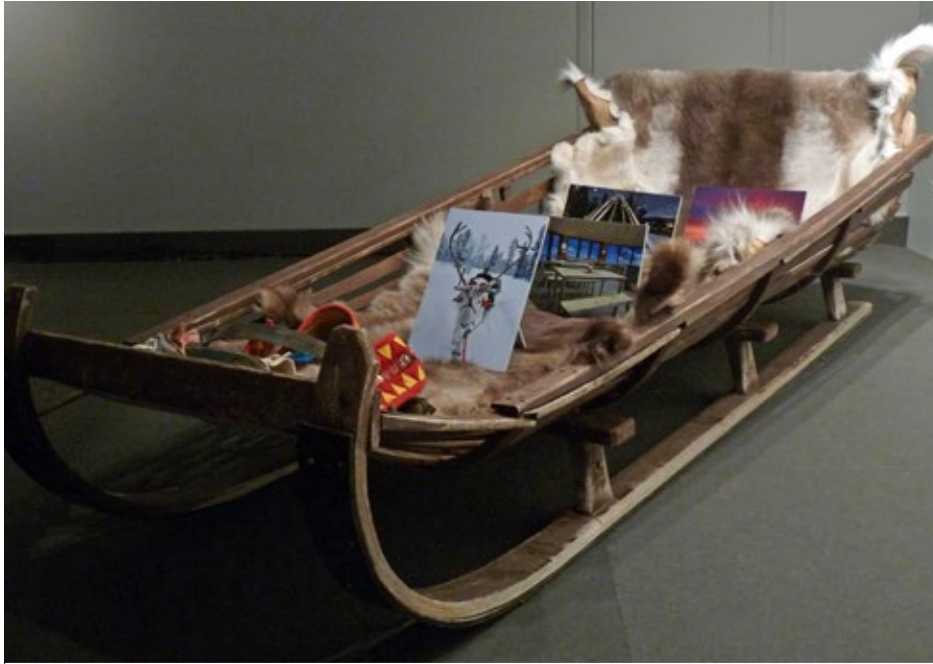
**Figure 6.** An agamograph (Photograph: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017) of a picture of a reindeer herd (Photograph: Petri Mattus, 2016) that turns into a picture of a reindeer killed by a predator (Photograph: Petri Mattus, 2017).

cosy restaurants, reindeer sledge tours, and beautiful views. On the wall behind were photographs of the reindeer herders' daily routines, such as reindeer feeding, repairing of motors and sledges, short moments with family, reindeer slaughter, and meat processing. The installation wanted to enlighten the complex reality of the Sámi culture in tourism, where the reindeer is in a prominent position. The same livelihood looks very different from these two angles (Figure 7).

The reindeer herders meet other people and stakeholders in situations where they find themselves in situations of conflict or where they are trapped in their Sámi cultural history (see Lehtola, 2015; Valkonen, 2009). The most contradictory situations are with the defenders of wildlife predators and the tourism business. The traditional Sámi livelihoods are reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting. The Sámi reindeer herders are considered skilled and competent hunters and foresters who do not hesitate to defend their herd. According to Stammler and Takamura (2020), among others, the reindeer herders have a practical and respectful view of using natural resources. People living remotely from nature have raised posthumanist (Braidotti, 2013) interests and discussions of animal rights, with the aim of equality for the human and the non-human, and the living and the non-living. The confrontation develops because of people's ignorance of nature and its life cycles.

The tourism industry is a major stakeholder in Lapland. The second exhibit highlighted the complex use of Sámi culture in tourism. The Sámi people and reindeer herders





**Figure 7.** Behind the pleasure that the tourism business provides their customers is a daily life. Photographs of the sledge: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2017. Photographs below the sledge: Jouni Lukkari, 2017.



have long been used to promoting tourism in Lapland. This has tainted the picture of the Sámi culture in many ways over the years and has also led to preconceptions and incomplete information that has led to misunderstandings. Today, many Sámi reindeer herders participate as stakeholders in the tourism industry themselves. These people show the resilience of their culture, spreading their knowledge about their own livelihood.

These two representations of daily *taskscape*s describe situations that reindeer herders experience with other stakeholders in reindeer grazing areas. These situations have relevance in the discussion of the vulnerability and resilience of minority cultures.

### Discussion on Vulnerability, Resilience, and Art-based Activity

Our critical discussion of the exhibition proved that reindeer herder families were able to convey various aspects of their own lives and *taskscape*s to other people with the help of art-based practices, photographs, and exhibits. The results show enthusiasm and concern for sharing information about their reality in their daily lives in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Indigenous peoples in the Arctic are often described as vulnerable and resilient as a result of long-term colonialism and oppression (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). For reindeer herders, however, the defence of their grazing lands will become more difficult, since the impact of climate change and increasing population of the North is decreasing the size of the reindeer pastures. The big challenge is to cooperate and stand up to other people who do not know about the Sámi culture and contemporary reindeer herding, as Aikio and Hyvärinen (2004) and Freeman (2000) have highlighted. The cultural and economic environment for reindeer herding as a livelihood can, in this perspective, be seen as vulnerable in the present world.

A common definition of vulnerable is a person that easily can be physically or mentally hurt or influenced. Even if the reindeer herders involved have met with misunderstanding and ignorance about their livelihood and culture, they have a great trust in their culture, livelihood, and future. This Art based action research does not define the *individuals* of reindeer herder families as vulnerable. A deeper examination of the photographs and exhibits confirmed that the members of the families were, with the help of the art-based process, able to express how they saw themselves during changing working environments and livelihoods. Rather than vulnerability, resilience could describe their case. As people living with nature, they have shown the skills and knowledge to tackle natural challenges in their working environment.

Ford et al. (2020) claim that the terms resilience and vulnerability of Indigenous peoples to environmental change are socially constructed and closely linked to issues of sovereignty, power, social justice, development, and history. Vulnerability and resilience are terms that have been criticised in the academic world. For instance, Reid (2019) criticises the term 'Indigenous resilience' as a kind of implicit racism that is in compliance with neoliberal colonialism. Haalboom and Natcher (2012) stress that the term 'vulnerable' to describe Indigenous communities is also an agreed label, generated by the West who are not familiar with local cultures. The label has the potential, in turn, to shape Indigenous peoples' identities and how they see themselves (Haalboom & Natcher, 2012).

Sámi reindeer herders have shown proof of great resilience, which is understood to be a positive adaptation to unpleasant changes that will in the end be even empowering. The daily work changes, and the reindeer herders subsequently adapt new ways and apply them to their ancient Indigenous livelihood. According to Ford et al. (2020), this change and modernisation in reindeer herding are necessary in terms of maintaining their livelihoods as a compatible source of income in the North.

Another important dimension that we want to discuss is the educational dimension of art-based and photovoice research methods. Most of the members of the families took the photography task as an easy and convenient way to catch moments of their days that they wanted to convey to other people. Thanks to social media, photovoice seems to be an easily approachable research tool for the participating co-researchers. Almost everyone who owns a cell phone, photographs things in their daily lives. Some families were eager photographers who at the end of the year had made a visual diary, while some only photographed occasionally. Today, photography has become an everyday tool of social media and it is not automatically an artistic activity, but when it is used as a visual method of self-expression (as it appears to be using the photovoice method), it can be defined as an arts-based method (Seppälä et al., 2021).

This project aims to reveal and clarify the contemporary reindeer herding to other people by using different visual ways of expression. Five reindeer herder families volunteered for the project. The function of the photograph task was at first to entice the families to convey aspects of their daily lives and for the photos to be used as inspiration in the exhibition about reindeer herding. The families valued their privacy and had not, at this point, the intention to show their photos in public, but gave their consent of using the photographs as research data. While the photographs were examined together, it appeared that the photography action had multilevel values both as research data as well as community art. The fact that they had made self-expressing design choices with the

camera, both consciously with care and by direct snapshots, turned their photographing action into an art-based action. The participants faced creativity and made an art-based visual story about their daily lives. At the point when the exhibition was to be built the families agreed and also gave their consent to exhibit their photographs in the exhibition at Siida Sámi museum in 2017. They thought it was the most explicit way to show their daily life as reindeer herders for the audience. They chose the photographs for the exhibition themselves and planned the installations for the performance.

Controversy surrounds whether the photovoice method is a reliable research method because of its subjective emphasis and the difficulties of interpreting the visual data in an unequivocal way. There is critique of the imprecise outcome that has more of an artistic expression. Korsström-Magga's research shows that certain types of data are easier to capture by arts-based methods, as Barone and Eisner (2012) and Leavy (2015) have pointed out. However, it is clear that if data (in this case, photographs) is art, even if it is produced by art-based research methods, it is more difficult to define unambiguously. There is always room for reinterpretation in the final results, including in this case.

The installations of *taskscape*s that the reindeer herder families built up, with the assistance of Korsström-Magga, fit also well the permanent ethnographic exhibition in Siida Sámi Museum, that is presenting Sámi culture by combining photographs and objects to undoubtedly serve as an educational inspiration.

The connection of the *taskscape*-exhibits to Sámi contemporary art is interesting, as the Sámi Art section of the Venice Biennale 2022 offers very similar solutions (Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2022). The Sámi artist Joar Nango also used a similar way of conveying a message with the help of objects in his exhibition section *Sámi Library* in Helsinki Contemporary Art Centre Kiasma 2022 (Yle Sámi, 2022). The reindeer herder families' photography process and the installations in the exhibition reflected similarities with the forms of Sámi contemporary art, which strive to utilise the culture's own material and cultural ways of expression (Grini, 2017; Hansen, 2019; Lundström et al., 2015). As the result of Korsström-Magga's exhibition project reflecting and renewing cultural heritage and creating new arts-based form of expression based on nature, culture and current debates on posthumanism, it can be seen as Arctic art (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020; Jokela et al. 2019; Huhmarniemi 2019). Arctic art can be seen as a Northern contribution in the international discussion on Arctic art as art education for sustainability (Härkönen, 2021; Wagner et.al., 2021).

## Conclusion

This participatory art-based action project using the photovoice method facilitated in this exhibition is still going on in this reindeer herders' society. The visual way of acknowledging their livelihood seems to be useful and the reindeer herding families are continuing the spreading of the visual information. The photos, exhibits, and the exhibition entity embrace the silent ecocultural knowledge, referred in this chapter to the Sámi Indigenous knowledge, and the new insights of changes that the Sámi reindeer herders experience in their daily lives and want to show to the outside audience. The participatory art-based activity shares information and opens possibilities to revitalise the reindeer herders' livelihood to a meaningful profession, also in the counterparts' eyes. The exhibition highlights the most important issues in contemporary reindeer herders' daily lives, where the "knowing with" the working surroundings with the reindeer has a great role. Exposing their reality by taking photographs has an empowering impact on reindeer herders' society, which also gives them possibilities for resilience to cope with the changes in their daily environment.

The reindeer herder families are still active in this project, and they are currently planning to publish a book about their livelihood based on their own photographs. In this case the art-based action research method has shown qualities that bring forward knowledge about human societies and cultures. Participating in creative and visual action is an approachable way for the participants to open their views and opinions. The process opens the value of co-knowing that may offer help in and for a rapidly changing world.

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# Northern Forest Memories: Sensing Arctic Nature Through Creative Practice with Clay

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It is September 2020, the first day of autumn. With anticipation, I am heading to Ounasvaara forest. My backpack is filled with clay, wooden boards, rolling pins, matches, and a vision of today's art-based experiment of creating and re-connecting with the forest. (Extract from Kravtsov's field diary, 2020)

For generations, people living in the Arctic have developed strong bonds with their natural environment. Nevertheless, an urbanised, indoor lifestyle has eroded our relationship with non-human nature and weakened our ability to sense and communicate with our surroundings the way that our ancestors did (Ives et al., 2018; Landy & Shaler, 2021). This chapter's purpose is to discuss the *Northern Forest Memories* pilot workshop that focused on encouraging communication with nature through an art-based experience with clay and natural materials in forest settings. This small-scale intervention was planned and guided by Kravtsov in Rovaniemi, in Finnish Lapland, as one of several pilot workshops carried out within the framework of the *Art-based Services for Tourism Project 2019–2021* (see endnote). The project focused on developing new types of art and craft-based activities and products by artists, crafters and designers in Finnish Lapland, supporting collaboration between creative industries and the tourism sector (Jokela et al., 2021).

While the original idea was to arrange the pilot with foreign travellers, the Covid-19 travel restrictions changed these plans. Testing the idea with locals and newcomers offered a chance to explore the possibilities of visiting these supposedly mundane environments in meaningful and transformative ways (Rantala et al., 2020). This dimension brought us writers together to discuss the possibilities of enhancing more-than-human connections through art-based methods and services (using the expertise of Kravtsov) and proximity tourism (a special interest of Höckert). At a broader level, we share a growing concern about the urgent need of revitalising our ecological sensibility toward all living beings; that is, to foster care-full approaches that can help us to engage and live with the non-human nature (Lysaker, 2020; Rantala et al., 2020).



This chapter draws inspiration from Timo Jokela's (2008; 2013) writing that explores the art-environment relations with emphasis on the dialogic, contextual and situational aspects of contemporary art. Our work is also guided by van Boeckel (2007) research in which he seeks to experience the environment through senses and creativity. His philosophy of arts-based environmental education builds on the presupposition that artmaking activities can sharpen and deepen our perceptions and make us more receptive to the mysteries of the world (2007). This kind of openness to sensitivity and re-enchantment (Caton et al., 2021) that begins with enjoying being with more-than human nature does not merely belong to the order of the thought but, in Levinas's (1969, p. 135) words, "to that of sentiment." As Levinas suggests, "One does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the green of the leaves, the red of this sunset." The Levinasian notion of sensibility is both a "mode of enjoyment" and of responsibility, which escapes exact representation and hence troubles our rational thought (Levinas, 1969, p. 135; Vannini, 2015). In other words, sensibility is not a moment of representation or understanding, but an instance of experiencing and enjoying without possession (Levinas, 1969).

This chapter asks how art-based practices can be used to enhance ecological sensibility and nature connectedness. More specifically, through our discussions about the workshop memories, we wish to draw attention to the importance of sensitive and tactile approaches in a creative intervention with clay. By doing this, the chapter joins discussions about the endless variety of nonverbal communication with nature (Marder, 2016). As Kallio-Tavin (2013) explains in her research on art-based pedagogy, it is impossible to know exactly how and what others perceive, which leaves us with an option of thinking about others' perceptions through our own. For this reason, the chapter approaches the possibilities of art-based activities, especially from the facilitator's perspective, whose aim is to create conditions for sensible encounters with nature. Before following our guide to the forest, we wish to share the background and a short overview of the art-based action research (ABAR), as a methodological orientation of the pilot workshop.

## Background to the Pilot Workshop

The *Art-based Services for Tourism Project* was born from the interest of developing performances and art- and craft-based tourism activities with a focus on the cultural heritage of Finnish Lapland. In the project's framework, the University of Lapland hired seven freelance artist-researchers based locally. Working collaboratively, artists,

students and staff members conducted parallel research cycles. The research process included identifying the needs, challenges and expectations of partner galleries and museums in Finnish Lapland as they pertain to tourist activities for the summer and engaging tourists in visiting art galleries. Preliminary concepts of new services were brainstormed during co-design sessions with the team members. Some of these ideas were chosen for further development and testing.

The idea behind the *Northern Forest Memories* art workshop addressed two main aspects discussed during the co-design sessions: the seasonality of tourism in Finnish Lapland and connectedness to nature. Recently, tourism in Finnish Lapland has been mainly based on winter activities, with a strong marketing focus on the *aurora borealis* and Christmas themes, thus leading to a disproportional workload over the year and partial use of infrastructure (Rantala et al., 2019). This has led to discussions on the need for developing new tourist services and conditions to direct attention towards other seasons in the Arctic and facilitate a more sensitive and genuine experience with local nature and culture (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2019; Kugapi et al., 2020a). In recent years, scholars and practitioners alike have addressed and explored the concept of creative tourism in the context of Finnish Lapland (Kugapi et al., 2020b; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021; Sarantou et al., 2021). As a contrast to mass tourism, creative tourism offers opportunities for developing new authentic practices involving many fields of art and culture, thereby stimulating co-creation between host and guests (Richards, 2011). Richards (2019, p. 8) highlights the strength of creative tourism as a strategy for small places, “based on personal interaction, one-to-one contacts between tourists and locals and depth of place experience.” Remote and small in terms of population, Rovaniemi offers natural and cultural assets that the tourism industry is yet to explore and integrate through alternative methods.

The second aspect the workshop would address is the lack of connectedness and direct engagement with nature that many of us living in urban settings experience (Lumber et al., 2017). Moreover, the process of globalisation has led to rapid development of knowledge and technology, and competition in many spheres of life. These overwhelming conditions have impacted our ability to relate with non-human nature and pay attention to details and nuances in our surroundings. Therefore, looking for new ways to communicate with non-human nature is essential in order to re-foster a nature connectedness. Tourism can be one of the spheres for such endeavours to occur through experiences that offer, for instance, direct contact with nature. The *Northern Forest Memories* service idea was developed and tested as a small-scale experiment to address the above thoughts.

## Small-scale Creative Intervention via ABAR

This study followed the principles of the practice-driven ABAR method, which finds its roots in action research, as well as artistic and art-based research. Developed collaboratively by a group of art educators and researchers at the University of Lapland, ABAR strategy aims to promote sustainable development by producing methods, practices and models of activities that encourage stakeholders, local communities or society, in general, to strive towards more responsible practices in the changing North and the Arctic (Jokela, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). In the ABAR model, practice is commonly based on diverse data such as digital documentation of the practice, research diaries and feedback discussions. Research data for this study were collected via participatory observations, video and photographic documentation, a research diary and written feedback on the participants' reflections. Along with the principles of ABAR, Kravtsov played an active role throughout the research process by promoting development, reflection and evaluation of the pilot (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

We analysed and evaluated the data collected through several cycles of reflective discussion and writing sessions. This process enabled us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the tested service idea and think of further development and improvement of the practice. Cross-disciplinary backgrounds facilitated a wider perspective on the discussion and analysis, and also crystallised the lenses we are using to make sense of, and engage with, the world. For instance, Höckert as a tourism researcher approached the workshop by conceptualising the ideas of openness and sensitivity in caring, more-than-human encounters (Höckert et al., 2022). Yet, along the way, she experienced an epiphany about the role of touching and being touched in sensitive relations with non-human nature; that is, about something very central and self-evident in Kravtsov's work on art-based methods.

Planned and guided by Kravtsov, the *Northern Forest Memories* pilot workshop consisted of a slow walk in a forest on Ounasvaara hill and making an art-piece with clay and gathered natural materials. The invited participants—four children, five adults and a dog—were guided to become attentive to different beings in the forest and to attempt to express the feeling of the northern forest by imprinting natural materials onto a clay surface. After the activity, the clay pieces were glazed and fired, then carefully packed and delivered to their owners to help them recall the memorable moments spent in the forest.

Throughout the analysis, our focus was drawn to the ways in which this small-scale creative intervention supported an open and responsible orientation and non-verbal in-

teraction with non-human nature (Lysaker, 2020). We draw attention to the questions of how the atmosphere, group dynamics, material tools and instructions can spark the sense and mood of creativity and care for non-human nature. In the following, we share our discussions of the workshop together with photographs and extracts from Kravtsov's field diary.

## The Pilot Workshop

### *Walking with Sensitivity*

This morning, I held a pilot workshop called Northern Forest Memories. I met the participants in the parking lot. After welcoming words, we started a slow walk into the woods. I guided the participants to pay attention to our senses, smell, observe, and listen, feeling the forest as a whole entity. We were humbled guests in a quite familiar environment, since all of us live in Rovaniemi. Today, the purpose of our visit was neither hiking nor picking berries, but sensing nature through creative experience with clay and making a little memorable art piece. (Extract from Kravtsov's field diary, 2020)

During the pandemic lockdown, many of us began to explore our proximate surroundings and previously considered mundane settings in new ways. The exceptional situation both challenged people and offered an unforeseen opportunity to slow down and re-envision alternative, restorative experiences in nature (Edelheim et al., 2020). Return visits to the near-by hills, waters and forests have all offered glimpses of hope about a more curious, caring and sensitive orientation toward the non-human world (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). Educational philosophers and health and well-being researchers have highlighted the significance of meaningful reconnection with nature from personal and cultural perspectives (Anderson & Suominen Guyas, 2012; van Boeckel 2009, 2017). For example, Lumber et al. (2017, p. 21) suggested a beneficial correlation between nature connectedness, well-being and pro-environmental behaviour, and proposed involving "contact, meaning, emotion, compassion and beauty" in activities directed towards creating bonds with nature. In a similar way, tourism scholars Kellee Caton, Chris Hurst and Bryan Grimwood (2022) have called for a re-enchantment of the world by inviting us back to our sensing bodies (Landy & Salen, 2021).

These discussions can be seen as the ground from which the conceptualisation of the *Northern Forest Memories* pilot workshop has been growing. Nevertheless, different from

a regular walk in the woods, the workshop included guidance, the company of a group of people and a dog, and the aim of creating artwork. Since the beginning of the workshop, the participants were encouraged to slow down, become more attentive to non-human nature and communicate with the forest beyond spoken language (Marder, 2016).

Place-specificity is reflected in the choice of holding such workshops in forest settings. Similarly to the *Wooden Spoons* art project by Stöckell, the creation of an art piece in the pilot workshop occurred “through slow dialogue with the place, material and other participants” (Stöckell, 2018, p. 92). While such a workshop is universal in means of geography and can be practised anywhere in the world, implementation of it in a particular place and time adds significant features to the experience (Jokela, 2008). The art piece holds memories of the moment of being present, recalling the place and situation where it was made, not only visually, but also sentimentally.

## Wandering and Gathering

After our walk, we arrived at the fireplace by a bird-watching tower and took a few minutes to settle. I asked the participants to wander in the forest, observe the surroundings closely and collect natural materials to be imprinted into clay. I joined the task myself; wandered around, feeling little rocks under my feet and breathing the pines. I picked one blueberry branch and a few pine needles. (Extract from Kravtsov’s field diary, 2020)

When we wander in a forest, we naturally involve our senses and communicate with the place using our whole body. Such relations are mutual; we absorb the forest through sensory and bodily experiences and the forest absorbs our presence and movements (Rantala et al., 2020). We breathe the forest and the forest breathes us. We can think of the forest as a whole entity, as a living organism. Perhaps we cannot recognise and perceive all its elements, but we can try to sense it and connect with it in our own ways. In her fascinating book, *Think Like a Tree*, Sarah Spencer addresses the complex interconnections of all ecosystems, and calls for a reconnection with the natural world through various experiments and daily tasks that involve engagement with nature, both mentally and physically (Spencer, 2019).

In the pilot workshop, participants were asked to direct closer attention to different elements of the forest. Collecting natural materials for artmaking stimulated proximate, tactile and quiet conversation with nature through slowing down and focusing on one element at a time. The process of gathering can be seen as a composition of actions:

moving, breathing, observing, noticing, approaching, touching, sensing and collecting. The task involved sensing and experiencing the environment, thereby stimulating intuition and sensitivity rather than collecting information or being concerned with the exact outcome (van Boeckel, 2017).

It is intriguing to think about what influenced the participants' choice of materials and whether the chosen materials carried the participants' own memories or stories. This question remained open, leaving space for revealing personal narratives and imprinting them into a piece of clay. Wandering and gathering in this way enables one to become sensitive to intangible senses, such as security, care, joy and nostalgia. Van Boeckel's (2017) research draws attention to the facilitator's responsibility of creating a welcoming and safe space for the participants. This includes offering unconditional support, letting go of judgements and 'holding the space' as safe when something unexpected occurs. While van Boeckel's (2017) examples consist of unexpected emotions, workshops in natural environments and public places also include the possibility of changing weather conditions, small accidents or the arrival of surprise guests, both human and non-human. During the pilot workshop with clay, the appearance of a large group of young people disrupted the feeling of tranquillity and functioned as a good reminder of how the processes and outcomes of participation can never be fully planned (Höckert, 2018). At the same time, it raised questions about whether workshops like these could be planned in a more inclusive way without losing the sense of a safe and creative atmosphere.

## **A Sensitive Approach to Work with Clay: Recognising Details and Nuances**

To get into the making process, I introduced the clay as a sensitive being, emphasising its role as an essential non-human participant in the workshop. I demonstrated the imprinting technique by making a flat surface and pressing a blueberry branch into the soft clay with a rolling pin. I carefully removed the branch from the surface, and a delicate trace was revealed. I saw humble smiles. With anticipation, I welcomed the participants to slowly approach a piece of clay and the gathered materials. One of the children took care of the fireplace and, after a while, the warmth spread through transparent autumn air. (Extract from Kravtsov's field diary, 2020)





**Figure 1.** Participants during the pilot workshop by the fireplace in Ounasvaara, Rovaniemi.  
*Photograph: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2020*

Being around a fireplace stimulated a discussion about fire's role in working with clay (Figure 1). Kravtsov explained to the participants the complicated and long process of clay's transformation from a piece of mud into solid ceramics. In its wet stage, the earthy material is soft and listens to our hand's movement. After drying, clay loses its water content and becomes as fragile as a piece of biscuit. Firing transforms the clay into ceramics and strengthens it to some level, though it is still fragile, breakable and needs to be handled with care. Work with clay requires a slow, sensitive and gentle attitude. We ponder, can working with clay inspire us and promote a similar attitude towards others, human and non-human, and our surroundings?

Clay, as a material for the participants, enables and enhances creativity despite any lack of previous experience with it. In this case, the participants had not worked with clay before, but such experience was not needed. One participant wrote in her feedback

reflection, “I was surprised how easy it was to make the pattern with leaves.” Following the principles of ABAR, Kravtsov did not offer overly structured instructions on what to do, but fed the sense of creativity through freedom. She spoke with a slow tempo and guided the participants, including the clay, with sensitivity and care. Clay as a forgiving material enables mistakes and imperfection, leaving space for imagination and personal expression. Basic material and the simple imprinting technique encourage experimentation and lead to surprising outcomes. Van Boeckel’s explanation of his choice of basic materials for the workshops supports our thoughts: “the quality and intensity of an experience of artistic engagement – or, for that matter, of any deep experience at all – is not necessarily the function of the exquisiteness and complexity of the tools or working materials” (van Boeckel, 2017, p.75).

Introducing the clay as the main participant of the workshop was a special moment. It welcomed the participants to an embodied, sensuous experience with the clay. In his writings on non-representational methodologies, Philip Vannini (2015) describes sensuousness as something that we all can experience and which somewhat escapes description. Before collecting the clay into our hands, we do not really know how it will feel towards our skin, how it can be handled, and how it responds to our movements. Although we might not have experience working with clay, we have affective memories of squeezing wet soil or mud in our fingers as children or breaking pieces of soil when gardening. One participant shared her memories from the workshop:

The clay material was very good for this workshop in nature. And it was so nice to print the pieces of nature that were self-collected. I loved how Tatiana gently presented the workshop and talked about clay as a sensitive being; for example, that clay also has memory.

Working with clay requires communication through touching and being touched by clay, and sensing how our bodies and the clay correspond to these touches. The element of touching and being touched became a fundamental condition for sensibility (Derrida, 2008) throughout the workshop. This occurred first, by collecting the natural materials, then by forming the clay surface, and finally imprinting the materials into it. These actions were naturally directing the participants’ attention towards sensitivity in their tactile interaction with the materials, be it a blueberry branch, pine needle or clay. If the clay is pressed too much, it will not keep the desired shape; if the flower of fireweed is applied on the surface with too much pressure, it will not leave a delicate trace on it. Therefore, the participants were engaged in exploring their sensitivity towards touch (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** A mother and her son are arranging collected blueberry branches on the clay surface. Photograph: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2020.

This all made us ponder how a tactile experience a tactile experience with plants, stones, berries, pines and clay can evoke diversity of feelings and perhaps memories.

Soft clay can receive into its body very tiny details of the imprinted objects, by thus revealing unseen and unnoticed features (Figures 3 and 4). A leaf's imprint can be surprisingly detailed, exposing its texture on a macro level and encouraging a closer look. This enables us to see and sense familiar natural materials in a different way. When we draw our attention to small details, we become more aware of the nuances in the surrounding nature; different shades of green, contrasting textures of the moss and pine needle floor, tiny colourful lichen growing on boulders, small flowers growing here and there, and berries that escape our sight before coming closer. We believe that practising attentiveness can encourage curiosity towards our surroundings.



**Figures 3 and 4.** *Imprinting blueberry branches and pinecones into the clay surfaces.*  
*Photograph: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2020*

## Drying, Glazing and Firing

We walked back to the parking place; everyone was carefully carrying a small, imprinted memory on clay. I collected all the pieces in a cardboard box to transport to the ceramic studio for drying, glazing and firing. I notified the participants about the waiting process which might take several weeks to get their art piece back. We thanked each other and said goodbye. I stayed in the forest for a couple of moments, sitting on a rock with a cup of tea to reflect on the experience. (Extract from Kravtsov's field diary, 2020)

After the activity in the forest, the next step was to transform the clay into ceramic through a long process of drying, bisque firing, glazing and second firing. The glaze was applied according to the participants' desires for colour (Figure 5). However, an unexpected failure occurred with some of the art pieces. The glaze did not result in the expected shade. This required a second round of the glaze application and firing. Work with clay is time-consuming, and therefore requires patience. This can be compared to slow processes that happen in nature; for instance, the decay of leaves, seasonal changes and the growth of trees. Participants were asked to wait for several weeks to get their artwork back. Today's reality of accessibility and rapid speed in the digital world has made us used to getting immediate results. Sometimes waiting can be perceived with negativity. However, this type of creative workshop requires participants to slow down, look inwards and accept the process of waiting in a similar way as we wait for the sum-



**Figure 5.** In the ceramic studio, bisque fired ceramic art pieces waiting to be brushed with glaze. Photograph: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2020.

mer to arrive after a dark and long winter. Spencer (2019) suggests re-evaluating our relationship with time. She brings a beautiful example of patience by considering the lodgepole pine, whose cones stay on the tree for decades, patiently waiting for an appropriate moment to drop its seeds into the soil (Spencer, 2019). In the process of waiting, we see the potential to become aware and sensitive to the waiting process, for both the participants and the activity guide.

The glaze and firing transformed the clay pieces into something new. Some imprinted details were faded by the layer of glaze, while some became more accentuated (Figures 6 and 7). Returning the transformed art pieces to their owners was an emotional experience. Kravtsov noticed that some of the participants carefully observed and touched the textures on the ceramic surface, perhaps recalling the experience of that day spent in the forest with clay, natural materials and other participants. However, one child could





**Figures 6 and 7.** *Glazed and fired ceramic art pieces made by the participants during the pilot workshop. Photographs: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2020.*

not immediately recall the workshop and connect the physical object to the event in the past. Perhaps the waiting time was too long for the child's mind.

Such creative workshops enable making objects with aesthetic and cultural values, and offer possibilities for encountering non-human actors through tactile practices. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggest that tourists' participation in creative activities can make the experience more valuable and enjoyable, by lifting the experience to a personal level, thus creating deep and lasting memories. The self-made art piece as a tangible element of the activity adds a special value, holding emotional memories of the experienced moments. Stickdorn points out the importance of tangible assets in services related to the "post-service period," which happens after the customers return home. He explains that physical evidence, such as souvenirs, can stimulate the memory of positive experiences and continue strengthening the participants' perceptions of the service through an emo-



tional association (Stickdorn, 2011). One participant shared about the ceramic art piece she created with her son (Figure 6):

When we got the art-plate, we remembered the time when we made it together. We also tried to remember the location and people that were part of the experience. Sometimes we show the plate to visitors of our home and tell the stories. We are searching for a perfect place, where to put it in our home, so that it could be seen more.

## Future Workshops

This pilot workshop in forest settings has helped us gain new insights about the possibilities of sensitive and tactile approaches in art-based activities. We have used the notion of ecological sensibility to draw attention to the ways we touch and are being touched by non-human entities. Our discussions suggest that the notion of ecological sensibility can help us find new ways of communicating with non-human nature through different senses. Tourism research has, for a long time, focused on the tourists' gaze and the ways in which otherness becomes experienced and consumed through vision. While tourists' behaviours are often guided with signs like "do not touch," working with clay enhances a different way of engaging with the visited surroundings. Hence, our research calls for further conceptualisation and exploration of ecological sensibility within, and beyond, tourism and art research.

The pilot workshop offered insights that could be used for planning and facilitating similar creative workshops in the future. Firstly, it is important to consider the role of different senses in the workshop, and in which ways a multisensory experience might shape the participants' ability to attend and connect with non-human beings. For instance, sharing a warm cup of coffee or tea by the fireplace can add more layers to the experience, yet it might also remove the person's attention from the surrounding smells. At the same time, limiting the focus merely to tactile communication might unnecessarily limit our perceptions of the surroundings. Second, following van Boeckel's (2017) suggestion, it is important to avoid making positive or negative judgments about each other's works of art. The third lesson has to do with time. As firing and glazing the clay takes time, tourists who stay in a place for only a few days cannot bring the art piece home as a souvenir. One option could be that the guests leave the ready art pieces as a gift to the place they visited, and these art pieces would then be gathered into a joint

art installation. Another option could be to send the art piece by post, but this would prolong the waiting process. Moreover, as children and adults perceive time differently, speeding up the process of getting the objects glazed and fired will shorten the memory gap between the activity and retrieving the handmade piece. Finally, planning and facilitating a participatory workshop requires preparedness for surprises. While the workshop can be disturbed by the weather or uninvited guests, unexpected accidents can also take place with different steps of working with the clay.

After the workshop, when analysing the collected empirical material, we also engaged in a discussion about the concern of picking, ripping and removing blueberry branches, berries and flowers. We posed the question of whether the participants could be encouraged to make the prints without picking flowers or leaves, thereby enhancing a more sensitive orientation to vegetal beings. Perhaps our stay in the forest could resemble the presence of a bird or an ant whose traces are usually more tender? One can easily argue that the harms of this kind of small-scale activity are also very small, if not minimal.

By sharing the story of the workshop, we have tried to draw attention to different aspects of sensitivity and sensibility in creative practices and research methodologies. While non-human voices are often overheard in our research enquiries (Chakraborty 2020), we have wished to join the search for new kinds of sensitive methodological approaches that welcome these voices into research stories (Höckert et al., 2022; Kinnunen & Valtonen, 2018; Salmela & Valtonen, 2019). By engaging in creative practice with clay, we have discussed the possibilities of enhancing our relationships with non-human beings by creating new openings where hope, inspiration and new nuances can pour in. Humble being in a forest, immersed observation of its textures and shapes were carried through a tactile, creative work with clay. A slow interaction with each plant, feeling its structure and tiny details, facilitated intimate bonding with it. Tangible and intangible senses were carefully imprinted into a soft clay surface to be remembered.

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## Endnote

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A diverse and inspiring snapshot of what is going on in art and inquiry in Arctic and northern countries is presented by 16 authors, representing four northern countries in the eight essays contained within this book. Published in December 2022, the book draws on research and practice by academics, artists and researchers. Each chapter contributes thought-provoking, richly illustrated and often personal, first-hand accounts of current inquiry and practice across these regions.

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