

New Directions May Emerge

HELSINKI BIENNIAL
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2023



Helsinki Biennial was established by the City of Helsinki and is produced by HAM Helsinki Art Museum.

Titled *New Directions May Emerge*, the second edition of Helsinki Biennial is curated by Joasia Krysa, in collaboration with other intelligences – Museum of Impossible Forms, TBA21–Academy, Critical Environmental Data, ViCCA@Aalto Arts, and an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Entity.



Joasia Krysa

*As contamination changes
world-making projects,
mutual worlds – and new
directions – may emerge.*

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing
The Mushroom at the End of the World
2015

Helsinki Biennial 2023 adopts its title from anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing to draw attention to the ‘art of noticing’ small or invisible details. This points us to the issue of scale and how life – and art – is organized on a globalized scale. New directions may be less universalizing, and not necessarily scalable, while suggestive of ways more inclusive of other humans, animals, plants, environment, data, and other entities around us. In the context of the biennial, this becomes an invitation to experience art as part of wider relations and contingencies, to become aware of other agencies and other modes of sensing and sense-making, and to recognize that human actions are not the only ways to effect change.

This second edition of Helsinki Biennial is located on and off the shore of Helsinki, featuring the island of Vallisaari, one of over two hundred islands in the Helsinki Archipelago in the Baltic Sea. Further, the biennial extends beyond the island itself to embrace its position in the Gulf of Finland and to create connections elsewhere. Inland, it takes place at HAM Helsinki Art Museum, Central Library Oodi, in public spaces, and beyond the city centre at the Stoa and Caisa Cultural Centres, as well as online. This maps the specific geopolitical location of the biennial – connecting outwards to the south with Estonia (its shoreline visible from Vallisaari), to the west beyond the Baltic Sea and Europe, to the north with Sámi indigenous land, and inwards to include the cultural

and ethnic diversity of Helsinki. This cross-cultural mapping of spaces provides a starting point to reflect on crucial issues of our time – such as environmental damage, political conflict, and the effects of technology – issues that are both local and universal, yet that appear irresolvable.

As we are reminded, irresolvable issues are those to which there seem to be no viable answers. As such, the biennial navigates the relation between impossible and possible responses (as opposed to solutions), between the damaging effects of human actions and the collaborative tactics of reparation.

Unfolding through multimodal artistic acts of noticing, sensing and sense-making, the biennial moves from humans to non-humans and between varying scales – a spectrum spanning data as the smallest scale, through to islands and speculative new worlds denoting the largest. In doing so, the biennial becomes an invitation to consider how recognizing small or otherwise invisible details might prompt possibilities to act, to imagine differently, and reconcile the impact of human intervention, and environmental and technological damage.

The biennial takes its point of departure from the island of Vallisaari, the regenerative energy of multispecies landscapes, and data which is in turn manipulated by algorithms. It gathers ideas from an eclectic mix of influences – from natural science and cosmology, the supernatural and artificial intelligence, data science and science fiction, the sense-making practices of humans and nonhumans, the actions of sentient and other worldly beings – to identify some of the conditions through which *new directions may emerge*.

Placing diverse practices in dialogue with one another, from established and emerging artists and collectives, from Finland and across the world, the biennial present twenty-nine artists and collectives, twelve new commissions and further six new iterations of works produced specifically for Helsinki Biennial 2023 – Matti Aikio, Ahmed Al-Nawas & Minna Henriksson, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Golden Snail Opera (Anna Tsing, Yen-ling Tsai, Isabelle Caronelle, & Joelle Chevrier), Asunción Molinos Gordo, Alma Heikkilä, INTERPRT, Keiken, Sonya Lindfors, Tuula Närhinen, Lotta Petronella with Sami Tallberg & Lau Nau, PHOSfate (Mohamed Sleiman Labat & Pekka Niskanen), Diana Policarpo, Sepideh Rahaa, Bitá Razavi, Red Forest, Remedies (Sasha Huber & Petri Saarikko), Tabita Rezaire, Yehwan Song, Jenna Sutela, Emilija Škarnulytė, Suzanne Treister, Adrián Villar Rojas, and Zheng Mahler.

CONCEPTUAL THREADS

The registration of diversity across practices, geographies, and naming conventions underscores the curatorial approach. Three main conceptual threads are introduced – contamination, regeneration, and agency – not as themes but intersectional vectors through which practices convene without the need to settle on any precise direction or position. Rather, the

idea is to uncover spaces of possibility, to reflect on some of the geopolitical realities local to Helsinki and elsewhere, at a range of scales and operations. Arising from the conceptual threads are questions that guide the exhibition as a whole: How might contamination be a force for positive change? How can we use biennials for the wider regeneration of the social body? How might agency extend beyond humans to other nonhuman entities and assemblages, including artificial intelligences? How might these threads be channelled into rethinking the ways that practices and future worlds might be conceived?

What follows below is one proposed gathering of participating artists and artworks across these three vectors, while recognizing that there could be many other ways of drawing connections and gathering works.

Contamination

It is sobering to realize that the Baltic Sea remains one of the most contaminated waters in the world, polluted with military munitions, agricultural chemicals and urban waste; subjected to waste from regimes of violence, extractive capitalism, and unregulated industrialism, further contaminating our bodies and subjectivities. More specifically in relation to the island of Vallisaari, there are contradictions at play – the island’s unique biodiversity (it hosts one thousand butterfly species, protected bats, birds, communities of rare moss and lichen species) and its environmentally protected status as set against the remains of military contamination (fortifications built during Swedish and Russian rule, gunpowder magazines, zones of potential unexploded munitions, exclusion zones where visitors and activities are not permitted). The pond in the centre of the island is a case in point – once a source of enjoyment and recreation for residents living on the island, today it is not freely accessible. Reflecting on these conditions, the presented artworks propose new layers of productive contamination as a cross-pollination between practices, ideas, sites and entities.

Working between the realms of the documentary and the imaginary, Emilija Škarnulytė explores deep time and invisible structures, from the cosmic and geological to the ecological and political. Drawing inspiration from the Baltic Sea, her new research project and film *Hypoxia* (co-commissioned with TBA21–Academy) speculates on the contemporary scientific conditions and technologies related to deep-sea mining and ocean mapping from the imaginary perspective of a future archaeologist. With intent to reconstruct mythologies and beliefs of the past and present, looking at them from the future, the work brings together three threads: the ‘Baltic Anomaly’, a spacecraft reportedly lying at the bottom of the Baltic Sea; the human-made phenomenon of *hypoxia* – oxygen depletion in the ocean caused by the spiralling growth and decay of algae resulting in dead zones in the water – and the Lithuanian myth of the sea goddess Jūratė, whose amber palace lies beneath the waves as a capsule of deep time. It is here where “myth meets science and science fiction beneath the sea”.

Similarly engaged with environmental phenomena of water and wind, Tuula Närhinen adapts methods and instruments derived from the natural sciences. The installation *Deep Time Deposits: Tidal Impressions of the River Thames* (2020) – created during her residency in London’s Beaconsfield in 2020 and exhibited for the first time in Finland at Helsinki Biennial 2023 – builds upon an understanding of water as a dynamic agent and “naturally occurring archive of the Anthropocene”. It revisits Anna Atkins’ cyanotypes from 1843–52, using photographic records and traces of material culture to represent the archaeological condition of the foreshore and build a record of the river’s “anthropogenic burden”. Her work *The Plastic Horizon* (2019–23) gathers plastic debris collected over the years from Helsinki seashores to make the human footprint visible and knowable.

Closely monitoring the Baltic Sea from her studio located on Harakka Island over the last twenty years, Närhinen creates a systematized inventory of the environmental threats caused by anthropogenic waste such as plastic. Her long-term sustained commitment to environmental issues in Finland since the 1990s has paved the way for current practices that place multispecies worlds at the core (such as that of Finnish artist Alma Heikkilä discussed later in this text). Moving from water to soil, Dineo Seshee Bopape presents her ongoing project employing soil and other organic materials to build connections both to land and family. Expanding her practice to a new format in a public space context, her packed earth billboard work *I Re-member Mama* (2023) (supported by TBA21–Academy) is “an ancestral longing, a path to remembering personal and collective family her- and his-stories, futures, and parallel timelines”. The work constitutes a remembrance of the mothers’ endurance of capitalist patriarchy, colonialism, industrial pollution, oil industries, and environmental degradation of water and soil. The work is a call for healing, drawing attention to the memory of the land, and the power of human reparative acts to protect the natural environments and ‘the sacred’ (such as acts that led to the Colombian River Atrato being assigned the same rights as a human being and hence the right to protection).

Shifting attention from earth to forest, Ahmed Al-Nawas and Minna Henriksson extend their interest in the critical deconstruction of national identity by exploring the romanticized role of forestry in the Finnish national psyche. Their new AR work *Green Gold* (2023), an image of a boat pulling a large timber raft through the channel between Vallisaari and its neighbouring islands, connects the logistics of moving raw materials (through the Suez, Gibraltar, and Bosphorus channels, and the Saimaa channel shared by Finland and Russia) to the current geopolitical situation. The recent return of timber rafting reactivates discussions on national romanticism, the erasure of forests, labour conditions, war and trade.

Similarly, Matti Aikio reflects on the intersection of Western nation states and indigenous cultures in his new multi-channel video installation *Oikos* (commissioned with TBA21–Academy). With a background in reindeer herding, Aikio’s practice focuses on the historical

treatment of the Sámi population and the appropriation of indigenous identity – all themes related to Sámi self-determination, which have been under recent political debate in Finland. His work for the biennial draws attention to the conflicts between Sámi culture and the extraction of natural resources against the backdrop of the forest and energy industries. It raises questions related to the preservation of nature, generation of fossil-free energy, and human relations with other forms of life.

On a similar note, the transdisciplinary constellation Red Forest (Oleksiy Radynski, David Muñoz-Alcántara, Diana McCarty, Mijke van der Drift) works towards transformative justice and ecological reparations. Their new work *On the Loss of Energy. Radiogram from the Remnants of Collisions*. (2023) is an online, site-specific poetic sonic address that links documentary research, speculative history, and science fiction. It continues their investigation into how infrastructural operations are key to contemporary forms of hybrid warfare. By speculating on energy matters in the context of war, their research contests fossil fascism, environmental racism, and financial colonialism.

Reflecting on the political and colonialist structures of various countries, Bitá Razavi examines the inner workings of social systems. Alongside *Elevated Platform*, which highlights the conditions of social mobility, the kinetic sculpture *Kratt: Diabolo. No 3* (2022) takes its name from an enslaved magical creature from Estonian mythology, producing botanical drawings on command for those who accept the consequences. The botanical drawings are by Emilie Saal, an Estonian botanical painter who worked in Java between 1899 and 1920. Saal’s reliance on the labour of local Indonesian women is shown alongside images of destroyed landscapes documenting conditions of colonial exploitation of labour and land. Underlying this work is a wider comment on the complex relationships between different systems of knowledge, processes of automation and colonialism.

The speculative and transdisciplinary research of Diana Policarpo takes the form of the large-scale installation *Ciguatera* (2022) – named after a condition caused by the ingestion of marine food contaminated with a toxin – which offers a case study from the Ilhas Selvagens (Savage Islands) in the North Atlantic Ocean, close to Madeira and the Canary Islands. The occurrence of disease is here more widely interlinked with climate change, interspecies relations and the legacies of colonialism. Mapping colonial histories through the tracking of natural biodiversity, the giant rock-shaped sculptures contain embedded video and audio telling stories of the island and its inhabitants which are simultaneously factual and fictitious, informed both by science and science fiction.

Continuing their long-term project *Remedies*, which explores methods of self-help and medical healing, Sasha Huber and Petri Saarikko present their new site-specific installation *Sanctuary, Mist* (2023). Located near the island’s pond – as mentioned, a site shaped by contamination, use and misuse, and currently in recovery – the work reflects on the natural landscape as a backdrop to human intervention and recuperation, and the concept of *pharmakon* (both poison and cure).

The practice of choreographer Sonya Lindfors centres on questions of representation and power structures, Blackness and Black body politics, speculative futures and decolonial dreaming practices. Her new collaborative social choreography *common moves* (2023) is an act of occupying public space unfolding through the application of simple scores and choreographies that questions our conception of what is held to be 'in common', that which is not underrepresented or marginalized.

Similarly, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley connects lived experience with fiction to create spaces of interaction and to retell stories of Black trans people. Their new work *Thou Shall Not Assume* (2023) is a role-playing performance event and installation exploring the speculative Black trans mythology of Vallisaari Island, taking us on a journey to meet various characters in the form of physical sculptures. An online counterpart will allow participants to listen to the personal stories of these characters, bringing their fictional histories to life.

Regeneration

Recognizing that biennials have been often founded on the principles of urban regeneration, encouraging economic investment and tourism, the exhibited works additionally propose how regeneration can also be a force for healing and repair. Until recently, the island of Vallisaari was home to a small community of residents with its own facilities including a school, library, weather station, a pond used for recreational activities, and a sauna. The culture of the sauna – operating as it does outside the demands of the economy – offers a good example of a path to regenerating the body and contributing to well-being. What is left to regenerate and how can it be regenerated for social good?

Connecting digital, corporeal and ancestral memory as sites of potential healing, Tabita Rezaire explores how the ocean is home to phenomena such as fibre optic cables, sunken cities, and drowned bodies. Her video work *Deep Down Tidal* (2017) explores how the infrastructure of submarine fibre optic cables that transfer digital data are layered upon old colonial shipping routes. Complex cosmological, spiritual, political and technological narratives emerge from water as an interface to understand the legacies of colonialism.

Similarly, INTERPRT – a research agency engaging with environmental justice and human rights – produce visualizations, remote sensing analysis, maps and video evidence to expose environmental issues and contemporary forms of green colonialism. In their new commission for the Nordic context, *Colonial Present: Counter-mapping the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Sápmi* (2023), they develop a case study based on Sámi land rights, the truth commission and the reconciliation process, working closely with Sámi journalists and advocacy groups with a commitment to environmental justice.

Zheng Mahler, a transdisciplinary collaboration between artist Royce Ng and anthropologist Daisy Bisenieks, examine relational networks, connecting nature and technology and more-than-human geographies, exploring their mutual flows of influence and the environmental architectures they produce. In a new version of *The Green Crab* (2022),

a speculative archaeology of East Asian urbanism, they draw connections between the Hong Kong archipelago where they live and the Helsinki Archipelago. The new iteration *SoilSpace* (2023) explores soil histories in the area and how they intersect with human histories, affecting the development of the urban landscape itself and the 'gardens' that grow out of those subterranean interactions. Similarly drawing attention to gardens, PHOSfate (Mohamed Sleiman Labat & Pekka Niskanen) address key issues of phosphorus pollution in the Baltic Sea region and phosphate extraction in West Sahara. Their installation *PHOSfate* (2023) enacts the technologies used in Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria for food production on the island of Vallisaari. Connections are established between a sea bottom that is turning into a desert, and a desert as a site of phosphate extraction that is blooming with thousands of family gardens.

Asunción Molinos Gordo pays tribute to the thousands of uses and forms of water through a sculptural series featuring water pottery produced in collaboration with artisans from Manises (Arturo Mora, Ana Palés and Juan Carlos Iñesta), who carry on ancient techniques developed during the Middle Ages in the Levant. *¿Cuánto río allá arriba!* (2021) derives from research undertaken on the equitable distribution of water and its importance in ensuring social peace, something that the world's rural communities understand as an indispensable resource.

Influenced by decolonial and feminist practices, as well as social and environmental justice, Sepideh Rahaa investigates and questions prevailing power structures, social norms and conventions through storytelling and everyday resistance. The installation *Songs to Earth, Songs to Seeds* (2022) – comprising a newly completed extended version of the video, rice plants growing in a hand-made ceramic pot traditional to her native Iran, and harvest rice dolls – highlights issues of food security, access to clean water and nourishment, as well as the importance of traditional forms of sustainable cultivation in the current climate emergency.

Lotta Petronella, a filmmaker and devoted medicine and flower essence maker and tarot scholar, has worked with and on islands for nearly two decades, focusing for the last seven years on the island of Seili. In her new commissioned work *Materia Medica of Islands* (2023), Lotta Petronella collaborates with the award-winning chef, food writer and foraging pioneer Sami Tallberg, and composer and performer Lau Nau (Laura Naukkarinen). Together they have created a transdisciplinary artwork of healing, song and ingestion that interacts with the diverse human and non-human inhabitants of Vallisaari Island – an apothecary, a lamenting choir, nightly recordings of moths and a commemoration to Ilma Lindgren, the woman who fought to secure everyone equal rights to roam and forage freely on land virtually anywhere in Finland.

Agency

The ability to act, the concept of agency, is invoked to further explore how human life, the environment and technologies can evolve together to produce new and unforeseen results. Rather than position

these phenomena in conflict, what is proposed is a recognition of forms of agency that include other-than-human entities and assemblages, including artificial intelligence (AI).

Exploring connections between AI and more-than-human microbial lives, and foregrounding technological and biological contaminations, Jenna Sutela presents *Pond Brain* (2023) (produced in collaboration with Copenhagen Contemporary), a water spring bowl equipped with a microphone and a speaker, further connected to a neural network that is trained to respond to environmental and interplanetary sounds from outer space and under the sea, turning it into an instrument. Sutela explains that “as sound flows around in homeostatic loops through the air and through different machine learning algorithms, it is constantly transforming and thus exhibiting a life cycle of its own”.

Engaging with the relationship between new technologies, alternative belief systems and the potential futures of humanity, Suzanne Treister has developed unconventional bodies of research and eccentric narratives “to encourage the unification of art, spirituality, science and technology through hypnotic visions of our potential communal futures alongside those of possible extra-terrestrial entities or civilization”. Her work for Vallisaari Island, *Technoshamanic Systems: New Cosmological Models for Survival* (2021), proposes “microcosmic non-colonialist plans towards alternative visions of survival on earth and inhabitation of the cosmos”.

Alien intelligence is similarly invoked in the collaboration between Yehwan Song, an artist-designer who creates anti-user-friendly, non-user-centric, unconventional and diverse design, and Digital Visual Studies, a Max Planck Society project hosted by the University of Zurich. Together they developed the *Newly Formed* (2023) project, which is presented as a website that enables viewers to engage with an innovative AI Entity and navigate a 3D map of HAM Helsinki Art Museum’s art collection. Responding to users’ geolocations, the collection is processed by an algorithm generating newly formed entanglements, creating unexpected and unrepeatable groupings of artworks from the collection.

The artist collective Keiken create speculative worlds using game engines and extended reality (XR) technologies to explore the nature of consciousness and how we feel, think and perceive reality. Their new multimodal installation *Ángel Yōkai Atā* (*angel spirit house*) (co-commissioned with Kanal-Centre Pompidou) acts as a portal between Vallisaari Island and the metaverse. Encompassing both physical and digital elements, it includes a sound piece; a sculptural house on the water’s edge for “angels and spirits”, inspired by a visit to a magical spirit house in Thailand; a version of the *Morphogenic Angels* game world installed at the Cultural Centre Stoa, and an online interactive experience which allows viewers to virtually walk inside the spirit house and into a new world.

Similarly, as part of a research process of worldbuilding across human and more-than-human realms, Adrián Villar Rojas conceives long-term, collaborative projects taking the form of large-scale, site-specific environments that are both imposing and fragile and, importantly, which leave a minimal imprint due to their perishing materiality and parasitical

integration. His new commissioned work for Vallisaari expands on his *Brick Farm* series, inspired by the Argentinian hornero bird, which makes its nests from mud, straw and rubble, adapting them to human-built surroundings. Conceived in dialogue with the habitat and inhabitants of Vallisaari Island, his new work *From the Series The End of Imagination* (2023) is a series of sculptural, otherworldly shapes, designed this time by a fictional non-human builder, Time Engine software. The sculptures can be found attached to trees, rocks, and buildings scattered across the island. The work further marks a shift in Rojas’ practice, from organic ephemeral sculptures inspired by the hornero, to these more artificial, otherworldly new forms, or nests for unknown lifeforms. Exposed to the natural and built environment of Vallisaari, the sculptures change and evolve over time, much like the island itself, embracing ideas of destruction and decay as an inevitable part of the life cycle.

Alma Heikkilä in turn works primarily with subjects that lie beyond human sensory perception, such as microscopic bacteria and fungi, as well as the biosphere and climate change. In her new installation *coadapted with* (2023), canvases create a space in the forest that encloses a sculpture; rainwater is collected and mixed with ink derived from plants native to Vallisaari and then absorbed into plaster sculptures, resulting in their changing colour as the summer progresses. The work is suggestive of new and alternative ways to work, think and act in a multispecies world.

In *Golden Snail Opera – The More-Than-Human Performance of Friendly Farming on Taiwan’s Lanyang Plain* (2016), Anna Tsing, Yen-ling Tsai, Isabelle Carbonelle, and Joelle Chevrier produce a multispecies enactment of experimental natural history. Combining video and performance-oriented text, the players examine the plight of the golden treasure snail (and related golden apple snail), first imported to Taiwan from Argentina in 1979 for an imagined escargot industry, but now a major pest in rice agriculture in Taiwan and across Asia. While “farmers in the Green Revolution’s legacy use poison to exterminate the snails, a new generation of friendly farmers in Taiwan’s Yilan County hand-pick snails and attempt to learn enough about their lives to insert farming as one among many multispecies ways of life within the rice paddy.” Drawing on a variety of knowledge sources, including personal experience, international science, and local understandings of ghosts and deities, the work constructs a performative assemblage of more-than-human entities.

CURATORIAL INTELLIGENCES

Alongside the artistic practices and ideas presented above, Helsinki Biennial 2023 makes the case for new directions to emerge from expanded curatorial collaborations and from the coming together of human and non-human agencies. A number of art organizations, collectives, research institutions and technological entities have been invited to co-create this biennial edition, bringing together different

curatorial intelligences, knowledges and narratives, and exploring alternative ways of thinking and ‘doing biennial’ in common. This ‘post-curatorial collective intelligence’ approach – a term I draw from combining Bassam El Baroni’s suggestion of ‘post-curatorial’ and Markus Reymann’s idea of ‘curatorial intelligences’ – human and non-human voices and sensibilities, and a way of framing HB23 intensely collaborative curatorial work. The HB2023 Curatorial Intelligences are: Critical Environmental Data, Museum of Impossible Forms, TBA21–Academy, ViCCA@Aalto ARTS, and an AI Entity.

Critical Environmental Data

(CED) is a transdisciplinary research group at Aarhus University (Denmark) that embraces an understanding of environment as data, foregrounding architectures and infrastructures of environmental data. In their text for this publication, *New Directions May Emerge at 60.1381° N, 25.0037° E and 60.1700° N, 24.9299° E*, they describe their data-sensing approach as well as their interest in spaces and places of data and environmental change, the histories they express, as well as the speculative, sometimes even fictional ideas that emerge. These ideas have been instrumental in developing the overarching curatorial approach that we have taken together with artists in working with the biennial sites, and on the island in particular. Led by Jussi Parikka and working with researchers May Ee Wong and Paolo Patelli, the group’s contribution to Helsinki Biennial 2023 is manifold, comprising a year-long collaborative artistic research programme and the master class *Environment, Data, Contamination* at the University of Arts Helsinki hosted in collaboration with Samir Bhowmik and the Uniarts Helsinki Research Pavilion, culminating in a public symposium and an exhibition by participants of the course, as well as a series of *Environmental Data Audiotours*, which are essentially podcasts that map sites across the Biennial (such as the Lichen Garden at the Kaisaniemi Botanical Garden, weather station ruins on Vallisaari Island, the Ferry Port) to engage us in observing while moving across the city and the island, paying attention to what is visible and what is not visible, and to venture into speculative and historical dimensions beyond what we can see directly, thus suggesting alternative scenarios.

Museum of Impossible Forms

(MIF) is a cultural centre driven by the commitment to transgress the boundaries between art, politics, practice, theory, artist and spectator, and to reconfigure the notion of Museum. With its particular location in Kontula, East Helsinki, MIF is a gathering of diverse practices and agencies, with a commitment to building anticolonial, antipatriarchal and nonfascist futures. In their text for this publication *New Directions May Emerge Because We Need Alternatives to “Survival”* [...], they remind us – in the words of Anna Tsing – that “collaboration is to work across difference, which leads to contamination” and that “we are contaminated by our encounters, they change who we are as we make way for others”. This approach has informed the curatorial method, especially in the

choices of artistic practices, and in developing the discursive aspects of the programme. MIF’s curatorial contributions are manifested in the form of two strands of the public programme: *Polyphonic Entanglements* curated by Giovanna Esposito Yussif, a gathering that expands and interconnects some of the ecological ruinations addressed in the biennial through screenings, talks, and performances taking place at the Stoa and Caisa Cultural Centres; and *Agonistic Intelligence/s* (AI/s), curated by Ali Akbar Mehta, a six-day intensive summer school with invited research-led working groups composed of representatives from multiple artist-led organizations and collectives engaging with the HAM Helsinki Art Museum collection.

TBA21–Academy

is dedicated to research, artistic production, and new forms of knowledge, drawing attention especially to our relationships with oceans, the unfolding environmental crisis and growing injustices. In their text for this publication, *New Directions May Emerge, but Will We Be Able to Sense Them?*, Markus Reymann writes: “The Ocean’s ecosystems produce half the oxygen we breathe, represent 95 per cent of the planet’s biosphere, and soak up carbon dioxide as the world’s largest carbon sink. It is without a doubt one of our most powerful non-human allies in the struggle to decelerate the climate breakdown, yet it is hardly understood.” With TBA21–Academy comes an invitation to “think collaboratively with others – artists, scientists, environmentalists, legal experts, Indigenous knowledge holders, and many others – to create new knowledge and other imaginaries, as well as concrete actions.” This way of working, foregrounding knowledge systems based on relational rather than transactional practices, other-than-human voices, and a thought process that is deeply rooted in critical ecologies, informs the way we have conceived this edition of Helsinki Biennial, and it has influenced the choice of works from the TBA21 collection as well as new co-commissions.

ViCCA @ Aalto ARTS: Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art

(ViCCA) at Aalto University is committed to arts-driven engagement with societal, economic, ecological and philosophical concerns. Within the framework of the biennial, ViCCA’s Bassam El Baroni and Patrizia Costantin have developed *The Helsinki Biennial Art Mediation Forum* in collaboration with MA students and other researchers in the curatorial field. The forum conceives mediation as an extended ‘articulation space’ for the concerns, themes, and topics mapped out in the biennial’s curatorial approach and artistic contributions. Already the preliminary symposium held in December 2022 as part of the *Art Mediation Forum* highlighted how curatorial ecologies, including the computational, are linked to world-making and worldbuilding and to the transformative possibilities of alternative narratives. This conceptual thread has a strong resonance in the artworks selected for the exhibition. The forum also comprises a workshop with

Aalto University MA students and an invited group of curators, writers and researchers, a publication, and a series of public mediation events for visitors over the duration of the biennial.

AI Entity

is a collaboration between HAM Helsinki Art Museum Collections, Digital Visual Studies, a Max Planck Society project hosted at the University of Zurich, and artist Yehwan Song. Together, they explore a curatorial approach that is informed by Artificial Intelligence and automation, adding a non-human technological layer. In their motivation for the project, they state: “Over the past few years, many museums, art collections, libraries and other related institutions have been increasingly engaged in the process of digitizing their holdings and assets. While the main narrative for this endeavour is prompted by a desire to make those materials more accessible, as well as to preserve them in digital form, the practical reality for many people is that the collections remain locked away in a black box, more hidden than ever. When reduced to the form of a set of binary numbers, the materials and collections are rendered somewhat intangible.” With a specific focus on the collection of HAM Helsinki Art Museum, the application of various AI algorithms produces new connections and cross-contamination of artworks in the collection. In practical terms the project is presented as a website that allows viewers to engage with an innovative AI Entity and navigate a 3D map of HAM Helsinki Art Museum’s collection. Responding to data from artworks and geolocations, the algorithm curates new and often unexpected artwork selections from the collection. This is performed by different machine learning models and software “acknowledging the machinic perception of the artworks and to some extent the machinic interpretation of the HAM collection and its connections to the urban fabric of Helsinki [...] Machine curation involves the processing of synthetic metadata with AI algorithms. This synthetic metadata represents encoded information. What results is a *newly formed* entanglement emerging from the combined agencies of the model, the visitors, the city, and the collections”, together creating a blended curatorial vision. With intent to bring attention to what is not immediately visible or known to the human curator, this adds a new perceptual layer to the biennial narrative each time visitors interact with the website, effectively producing new iterations of the biennial based on works in the collection.

Helsinki Biennial 2023 is further realized through collaborations with The Rodina, a post-critical graphic design studio with “an experimental practice drenched in strategies of performance, play and subversion”, and Diogo Passhorino Studio, a research-based spatial design studio “investigating how emotional contexts can be brought into shaping spatial memories”. Together, they have added a new layer to the biennial narrative “in search for possible visual and spatial tools for new directions”.

The importance of wider human and nonhuman networks and ecologies in producing Helsinki Biennial 2023 has been established by now, I hope, not least with reference to practices of *worlding*: ways to bring worlds together and imagine them *otherwise*, to hold on to the possibility that we might (or may) find new directions or ways of living in, and understanding, the world. Returning to Tsing, the invitation is to explore the exhibitions, events, and publications of Helsinki Biennial 2023 as if wandering through a landscape:

“To walk attentively through a forest, even a damaged one, is to be caught by the abundance of life: ancient and new; underfoot and reaching into the light. But how does one tell the life of the forest? We might begin by looking for drama and adventure beyond the activities of humans... There are other ways of making worlds.”

Joasia Krysa

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