

THE HELSINKI BIENNIAL
ART MEDIATION FORUM 2023

An Anthology



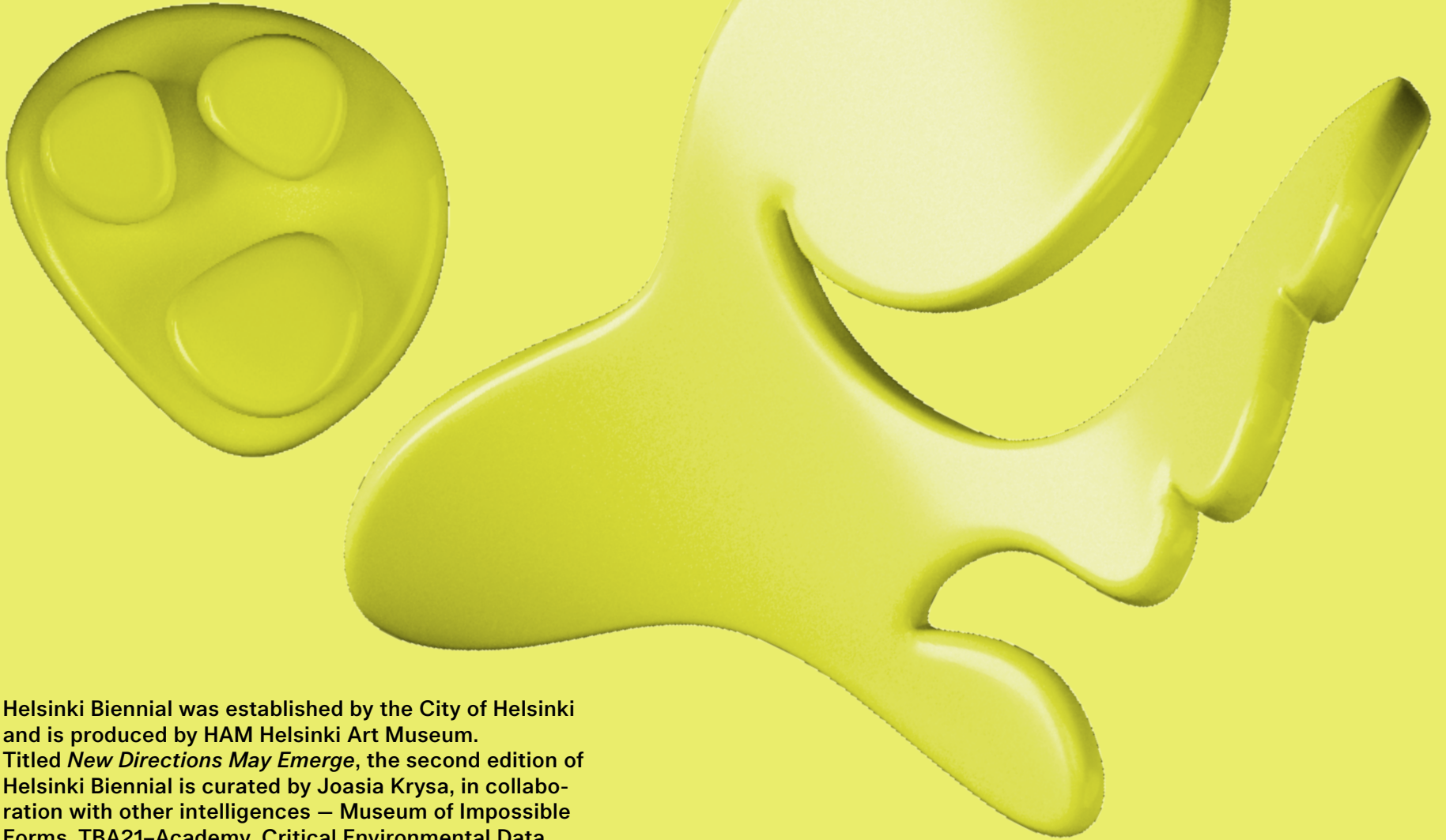
*The Helsinki
Biennial*

*Art
Mediation
Forum 2023*

An Anthology

THE HELSINKI BIENNIAL
ART MEDIATION FORUM 2023

An Anthology



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.

6	ABOUT	Helsinki Biennial 2023: New Directions May Emerge	64	PART 2	Directions Emerging from The Curatorial School of 'May'
8	PREFACE	As if wandering through a forest <i>Jocasia Krysa</i>		Navigating Turbulence—Towards the Making of Place <i>Cyane Kirdji and Myriam Gras</i>	66
13	INTRO	<i>Bassam El Baroni and Patrizia Costantini</i>		What Lures in the Deep: Interacting with Virtual Worlds <i>Alsha Mayer</i>	77
22	PART 1	Directions Emerging from Helsinki Biennial 2023 Symposium		(Is)land (In)visible: Tracing Storytellers and Other Ghosts of Vallisaari <i>Martina Terešová</i>	86
	Possible Love <i>Nilipa Rames</i>	24		Never Ours: A Story About How to Move and Where to Look as Island Visitors <i>Nicol Curator</i>	97
	Curating's Technological Unconscious: the History of Cybernetics and the Gaian Transformation of Curation <i>Adeena Mey</i>	35		Get Well Soon—Meditation for Institutional Healing <i>Julia Piddler</i>	109
	What Never Was but Might Yet Have Been <i>Livia Nolasco-Rózsás</i>	49	124	BIOGRAPHIES	




Index

HELSINKI BIENNIAL

New Directions May Emerge

12 June – 17 September
2023

*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 – *New Directions May Emerge* adopts its title from a quote by anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, who proposes learning from (the art of) “noticing”. With close attention to other people, animals, plants, environment, data, and other entities around us, the biennial explores how we might find new ways of living in, and understanding, the world. The biennial unfolds through multimodal artistic acts of noticing, sensing and sense-making. Moving 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 — the biennial is an invitation to consider how recognising small or otherwise invisible details might prompt possibilities to act, to imagine differently, and reconcile the impact of human intervention, environmental and technological damage.

New Directions May Emerge introduces three main conceptual threads — contamination, regeneration, and agency — not as themes but intersectional vectors through which practices and conversations convene without the need to settle on a precise direction or position.

Bringing together established and emerging artists and collectives from Finland and across the world Helsinki Biennial 2023 comprises exhibitions, public programme, film screenings, and publications. It takes place on Vallisaari Island, HAM Helsinki Art Museum and other venues and public places in the city, and online.

The second edition of Helsinki Biennial is curated by Joasia Krysa, with other intelligences — Museum of Impossible Forms, TBA21–Academy, Critical Environmental Data, ViCCA@Aalto Arts, and an AI entity.

The Helsinki Biennial 2023 participating artists are: Matti Aikio, Ahmed Al-Nawas & Minna Henriksson, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Golden Snail Opera, 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, Bitra Razavi, Red Forest, Remedies (Sasha Huber & Petri Saarikko), Tabita Rezaire, Yehwan Song, Jenna Sutela, Emilija Škarnulytė, Suzanne Treister, Adrián Villar Rojas, and Zheng Mahler.

Helsinki Biennial is produced by HAM Helsinki Art Museum.


Helsinki Biennial 2023 is further realized through creative collaboration 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 layer to the biennial narrative “in search for possible visual and spatial tool for new directions.”

PREFACE

As If Wandering Through a Forest

Joasia Krysa
Curator Helsinki Biennial
2023

ntitled *New Directions May Emerge*, Helsinki Biennial 2023 takes its inspiration from anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing to emphasize that—despite the major challenges of our time that appear irresolvable—there are many ways to find new directions, and new ways of living in, and understanding, the world whilst envisioning various potential futures. Tsing proposes learning from (the art of) “noticing” small or invisible details—to tune in to the world around us, to accept inevitable and irreversible facts and learn ways to reconcile with them through a different approach. Thus, paying close attention to people, animals, plants, environment, data, and other entities around us, the biennial explores how we might find new ways of living in, and understanding, the world, whilst envisioning various potential futures.

Located on and off the shore of the city of Helsinki, and featuring the island of Vallisaari, one of over 200 islands in the Helsinki Archipelago, the biennial reflects on the eco-diversity

of the island and its surroundings, while at the same time pointing to wider geopolitics. Gathering ideas from an eclectic mix of disciplinary and non-disciplinary influences—from natural science and cosmology, the supernatural and artificial intelligence, data science, and science fiction, to the sense-making practices of humans and non-humans—the biennial identifies some of the conditions through which new directions may emerge. The suggestion is that these directions might be less universalizing, while prompting ways of being more attentive to, and inclusive of, other entities around us, as part of wider relations and contingencies that help to reconcile and even repair some of the damaging effects of human actions. All this helps to locate the conceptual concerns and geopolitics of the biennial, such as *environmental damage, political conflict, and the effects of technology*—concerns that are local and universal at the same time.

This publication operates in this spirit and offers an open invitation to explore the biennial exhibitions and events as a process of mediation that involves other agencies and modes of sensing, and sense-making. To quote Tsing again, we might understand the experience of the biennial through her evocative description of *wandering through a forest*, and in this way consider the potential of mediation practices to elicit alternative knowledge of the world:

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.¹

Alongside its sister handbook publication, the one you are now reading is part of the *Art Mediation Forum* conceived by Bassam El Baroni and Patrizia Costantin at ViCCA (Visual Cultures, Curating and Contemporary Art), Aalto University. ViCCA@AltoARTS is one of five art organizations, collectives, research institutions, and technological entities invited to co-create this edition of Helsinki Biennial, informing the development and conceptual directions alongside Critical

Environmental Data (a research group at Aarhus University), Museum of Impossible Forms (a cultural center located in East Helsinki), TBA21–Academy (a contemporary art organization dedicated to oceans), and an AI Entity (a collaboration between Digital Visual Studies, Max Planck Society/University of Zurich, artist Yehwan Song, and HAM – Helsinki Art Museum Collections). Furthermore, HB23 edition is expanded through creative collaboration with the graphic design studio The Rodina and spatial consultancy Diogo Passhorino Studio “in search for possible visual and spatial tool for new directions.” These diverse curatorial collaborations come together to form what might be called *post-curatorial collective intelligences*—a phrase that combines the “post-curatorial” with “curatorial intelligences” and that emerged in conversation with Bassam El Baroni and Markus Reymann during the process of curating this biennial—an assemblage of human and nonhuman sensibilities demonstrating that curating is a process of mediation in itself.

The *Art Mediation Forum* project is itself a further curatorial collaboration, developed with ViCCA students and other researchers in the curatorial field. The inaugural symposium (held in December 2022 at HAM – Helsinki Art Museum) highlighted how curatorial ecologies, including the computational, are linked to worldmaking and to the transformative possibilities of alternative narratives. The Forum also comprises the *Curatorial School of ‘May’* (as in *New Directions May Emerge*), a workshop with Aalto University ViCCA students and an invited group of curators, writers, and researchers, as well as a series of public mediation events over the duration of the biennial.

This approach resonates with an understanding of mediation as adopted from the field of litigation, referring to negotiating resolution through an impartial third party, where all participants in mediation are encouraged to participate actively in the process, and refraining from providing prescriptive solutions or only one direction.² Moreover, the choice of the term *forum* (from the Latin word meaning an outdoor or public place) indicates the means through which open discussion and the expression of ideas can happen. Noticing the details here, even the etymology, allows for an opening up of alternative approaches to aesthetics, modes of perception that combine

sensing and sense-making above and beyond the human. The forum in this way can be understood as a “poly-perspectival assemblage of open epistemic and aesthetic multiplicity.”³ Or, as El Baroni and Costantin describe it, Art Mediation Forum is an expanded “articulation space” for the concerns, themes, and topics mapped out in the biennial’s curatorial approach and artistic contributions. The understanding is that artworks create spaces for reconsidering how we perceive things more broadly, and how we might reimagine or remediate our relationships to the human and non-human world.

With this backdrop, the Biennial introduces three conceptual threads—*contamination*, *regeneration*, and *agency*—not as themes but as ways of negotiating possible meanings and action, which in this context we might understand as a process of mediation. Importantly though, and in keeping with the curatorial approach of the biennial, mediation does not follow a didactic 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 these conceptual threads are questions that guide the exhibition as a whole and its mediation strategy: 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 channeled into rethinking the ways in which practices and future worlds may be conceived?

Unfolding through multimodal artistic acts of noticing, sensing, and sense-making, the biennial mediates between humans and non-humans at various scales—a spectrum spanning data at the smallest scale, through to islands and speculative new worlds. In doing so, it becomes an invitation to consider how mediation practices might prompt possibilities to act, to imagine things differently, to move beyond the ways we conventionally think about mediating art, and the ambition to reach new audiences and produce publics. Beyond conventional forms of mediation, directions emerge that go beyond the sense-making and world-making capabilities of humans alone. It is in this context that the Art mediation Forum and

the *Curatorial School of May* situate themselves. Their aim is to suggest viable ways to navigate potentials, not by proposing a finite solution, but by opening up further enquiries into Helsinki Biennial 2023's worlds of "May."

1 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

2 See Gabriela Saenger Silva, "Rethinking Biennials as Educational Tools," a research project examining the emergence of discursive biennials and approaches to public, learning, and mediation programs in contemporary art biennials, with reference to mediation projects at Mercosul Biennial (editions 6, 7, 8, and 9) and Liverpool Biennials (2016 and 2018), publication forthcoming 2024, Exhibition Research Lab, Liverpool John Moores University.

3 Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (London: Verso, 2021), 26.