

Conversation between **Andreas Nilsson** and **Mikko Kuorinki** conducted via email over the July - August 2017 in connection to *Objects described to Giorgos, Bernhard, Ekaterini & Marietta, Dzintars, Normunds, Viktors, Mattias, Sara, Bert, Shahar, Saara, Joonas and Timo*

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**AN: For your exhibition at HAM your initial idea was to present only works from your series "Objects described to...". These objects are all made by crafts people who have received certain instructions from you. Could you start off by telling your idea behind this series of works that has been in the making for two years?**

MK: The first objects were realised on the greek island Tinos, where I was for a one-month residency in 2015. The island is famous for it's marble quarries and carving, it's still a very vital profession there. There's even an art school for marble carvers. Of course I wanted to try doing something from this material which is rare for me. Very soon I realised it would be more interesting to talk someone into doing the piece for me, someone who knows the material inside out. I made the decision not to include any sketches, but only describe the object with a text.

This is for me the heart of the project: how a text or language translates into a physical object. How I imagine the object, how it translates and morphs in the mind of someone else. What do they focus on and what do they neglect. From the very beginning the descriptions were partly concrete and partly abstract, I might give measurements mixed with more associative lines. For me they function like poems. First objects (marble, ceramic, fabric) just happened to be made by artisans, people working mainly on use objects or decorative things. Their relationship with manufacturing objects felt so different from mine, somehow fresh, practical and to the point. Later, when I continued this project I decided to keep working only with artisans.

Maybe the origin of this idea came from a collaboration I did with Carl Palm in 2013. In his studio, Carl created sculptures he saw in a dream, photographed them, and sent the images to me. From these images I wrote short poetic text interpretations. In the exhibition only the texts were presented, and Carl never exhibited the sculptures. So basically I reversed this by dreaming up qualities of some unknown objects, writing texts about them and others manifesting them.

**AN: So the idea about passing things and instructions on to another person is maybe the crucial point here?**

MK: Yes, I think this might be which is ultimately in the core of this project for me – how an object is "squeezed out of language".

I keep returning often to those large linguistic questions: what is the relationship between language and whatever it is trying to convey, how language is based on a lack, as it refers to something that is missing or not present, the arbitrariness of it, how meaning is born, translation and transformation, how anything is being created in the first place.

It's important to state that I am describing some elements of these objects, not giving instructions. One significant thing for me was to let go of my personal aesthetic valuation... I had no control over the way the objects look, I only gave my input in the form of text and after that it was all up to my collaborators.

I also had this thought of an exhibition that wouldn't include any materials or objects based on my aesthetic choices. Sort of stepping aside for a moment. Something about this summoning and commissioning of the parts fascinated me. Of course I am doing the installation, as well as including some elements which will serve as a support and hosts for the described objects. Still that the core of the show is based on these decisions made by others, people who are not defining themselves as artists. Why was this important for me, I'm not sure.

For the exhibition at HAM, I have actually built my first plywood plinth, it will be hosting one of the described objects. I did my best and even though it's made a bit clumsily, still I'm kind of proud of it.

**AN: You touched upon the concept of translation. How things, shapes, words and movements change appearances and interpretations when transferred to another medium or language. Here, also between the field of craft and art. When it comes to craft, I often find myself trying to figure out the "use" of the object in question. I always think of the practical meaning of it. Which is quite the opposite of how I often engage with art, the best is when I don't understand it. I feel your objects created by crafts-persons often end up in an interesting limbo between these concepts of use/non-use. Objects trying to be something they are not, maybe lost in translation. Or enriched by translation. Here the activation of some of the objects is also interesting.**

**There is the “use” that I’m referring to, but yet again, maybe without any clear result. More of a repetitive pattern of movements, translating the objects into tools, into measures of time and space.**

MK: Often in my descriptions I mentioned that the object feels like it has been made for a specific purpose, but what this purpose is isn’t obvious or clear. In one way or another they yield the aspect of use but still don’t fully refuse it either. Maybe they are like the first phase of something that is still forming or a mute fragment from some bigger unrecognisable entity. I have been thinking myself also of ways to use these created objects and for a while I wanted to make some kind of demonstration video with them.

**AN: I’m writing these lines more or less on the border between France and Spain, where Walter Benjamin passed away too early. Benjamin’s thoughts on the aura of the artwork, and how to perceive an artwork in the age of reproduction can feel a bit passé and outmoded today, still it comes to mind when thinking about the process of your objects. And also when thinking about the distinction between you as an artist and the maker of the object as a person within the crafts.**

MK: The aura of the artwork is something I honestly haven’t thought of that much in connection to this exhibition. But it’s true that those questions are buried in there. The objects are designed and made by hand and they’re unique, which is not the case usually in my exhibitions. So maybe this is one way for me to look at objects more closely, go to source of how something is being created in the first place. Like how hands were the first container and how a cup was born from that. “I don’t know what all this says about the question of aura and authenticity.

**AN: I was pretty sure you didn’t think of the objects in the terms of aura, but I couldn’t not bring up the ideas of the “original, non-reproduced” artwork in this context. Even though, many of us find it worn out. More important though, is perhaps the local surroundings. The first ideas for the objects came from the very site you were at the time (Tinos). Is it important for you to work with local crafts-people where you exhibit at the moment?**

MK: In Tinos the locality was important, because I was there myself, learning about the materials, visiting the workshops, talking to people and finally the whole idea emerged out of these encounters. I also knew the objects would be exhibited for the first time on that

same island, in that small community of the people. In Tinos, one (maybe a bit romanticised) starting point was the thought that maybe instead of me taking something that is part of that landscape, forming it and the exhibiting it, I would only give an impulse in form of a text and everything would be done by the people who are more embedded in that environment. At that point I wasn’t thinking this project would continue in other places. Later on, as I did continue, in connection to other exhibitions I was not able to be there myself. So the connection to the artisans became more distant. In Riga for example, the curator dealt with all the communication. It took the project to other direction but the results were still interesting to me. It started to rely more on the contacts the organisers might have or who ever they could talk into doing objects practically without money.

**AN: But what happens when the objects are exhibited/translated into another environment? From Tinos, Riga, Copenhagen to Helsinki? What language do they speak, do they speak the same, or are they translated differently?**

MK: I am sure they speak different language in every room they are being shown. I hope they seem a bit alien, awkward family of objects, out of place in an contemporary art space.



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**Andreas Nilsson** is assistant curator at Moderna Museet Malmö. A selection of recent and forthcoming exhibitions include Groundhog Day (SIC, Helsinki, Dec 2017); Public Movement (Moderna Museet Malmö, Sep 2017); Laura Kaminskaitė and Mikko Kuorinki (both at Vermilion Sands, Copenhagen, 2016); The Visitors (Võru, Estonia, 2015).