

## Appu and Mikko's email conversation in September 2024 related to Hippolyte gallery's simultaneous exhibitions

M: You will be showing a long video work, is there some clear thing where it started, some original impulse?

A: When I think about beginnings, most often it's a visual element or situation that has begun to interest me. For this one, it was the view of an airplane in the night sky and a sound connected to it from inside the plane. Other elements of the work may have their roots elsewhere, but the plane was the thing that began to attract everything together.

I've seen some sketches of the works of your upcoming exhibition, do you consider them as one whole or more separate works? Is there a specific origin for them?

M: It is a whole that is built of separate works. In the future I will also present them elsewhere separately from the whole and modified.

The starting point for photographing flowers dates back to an experience at the first zen retreat I participated in, where during a break I was sitting outside drinking coffee and as if for the first time I saw a dandelion in its true actuality. How the dandelion gives its all in being a dandelion, regardless of whether anyone sees it, appreciates it or if it is considered a weed.

Maybe about a year after that I started to systematically photograph flowers which I assumed were daisies (it later turned out that there are several different flowers among them). It was important to photograph them without choosing for example certain aesthetic qualities. The other elements of the exhibition probably also relate to the experience at the retreat. Many things point to eyes, seeing and observing.

What was it about the airplane combination of sight and sound that intrigued you?

A: Probably the ability to include two different places and perspectives into one, distance and different connections between things. Flying relates to many intriguing things and as a physical phenomenon it is a thing of wonder, but on the other hand it is a clear part of problems with for example the environment. Watching a plane flying far away is still somehow calming, especially in a dark night sky, maybe because it's a clear sign that some life does exist, somewhere far away. A sign of stories inside the plane, of going somewhere. The contrast in the living conditions for people on the ground and the ones in the airplane can however be infinitely large.

The in-between state of the flight has also interested me, how they are in the middle of time zones, countries and cultures, and far detached from the surface of the earth. As the story for the video began to take shape, with many twists and turns much greater distances and disappearances came about into it, which would then reverse again into observing and searching.

For a long while, your works have consisted of different object collages, actions, sounds and materials in relation to their environment. How do you feel about photography in relation to your recent works (~last 10 years), do you see a similar materiality as with working with objects?

M: The photograph is a tool that I use constantly while sketching and collecting materials, visions and random things I stumble upon (@curatingjogger). Often they are inspiring works and exhibitions for me, although (or perhaps precisely because) they are not consciously made that way but ended up together through complex processes.

I may not regularly go to see more traditional photography art which is presented, for example, in a gallery space, but for me the ideal format for a photo is often publication. Maybe my "problem" is that the photos

themselves are openings to some other spaces and dimensions, and may, as it were, compete with the space. They take me into another space, that is their magic.

My attention is often drawn to space and what is present in it, as energies, as tensions, to the idiosyncrasies of it. One of the reasons I wanted to apply to Hippolyte was perhaps to somehow think about this “problem”, as well as the connection between found objects, views and photos. This upcoming exhibition has however diverged quite far from that starting point.

In the exhibition there are 504 flowers belonging to the daisy family, printed and placed over hardware store multifunctional tables. I also left the cellophane film they were wrapped in over the prints. I can't say what it does to those pictures, at least they are closer to items as part of the table. Being systemic with the method of photographing and the non-selectivity was essential for me.

A: I am reminded of Bernd and Hilla Becher's photo series of industrial buildings that were disappearing to make way for something new. While looking at the similar structures seen in images arranged in a grid some sort of common being starts to come forth, but one also sees each one as a special individual.

I myself also feel that photographs are perhaps the most often spaces opening up for the viewer. With moving image time, editing and sound mess up the purity of that space to some extent, but people are accustomed to reading the styles being used to build up the space. What I find most interesting is when those styles break – some common agreement is dismantled and we move from the familiar frame into something unknown.

Another work which you have described coming into the exhibition has straw hats as one of its materials. You've had hats in your works before (at least in one, *A hat cut in half* (2017)). For some reason, I find a hat in a gallery space somehow a funny element, which is of course a good thing. I have recently been watching Nathan Fielder's series *Nathan for You* (2013-2017). The series often takes ludicrous perspectives towards the rules and regulations of reality/community, perspectives which can however be seen stemming from

needs or desires which could be considered ordinary. In a way I see something similar in your working methods. Is humor in art important for you?

M: I often use different containers in my works and hats are also containers, shelters. In this exhibition I have filled the hoods of the hats with beeswax.

I am happy if people are amused in my exhibition. One can see the split hat on the floor of the gallery as a gag, at the same time for me there is some dramatic and cartoonish gesture of dismissal in it. I feel like I like shows that can in a certain ways seem light or simple, but which also open to other moods. Once when I had an exhibition where for me there was a lot of humor, an acquaintance thought the exhibition was dark. It was somehow gratifying.

Can you say something about the text that runs through your work? We hear two different voices at least? Do you want to open what the text consists of?

A: The video piece has a dialogue between two people plus one additional line. The whole plan was not known from the beginning, but it dawned slowly with each new piece of writing and shooting during the process. The text has various thoughts about the direction of social currents behind it. Its hibernating-like tone was found after a long search. I asked the people for the voices according to who I thought would be suitable for it, and with whom it would be nice to work.

Text and story are for me a way to get into more open meanings, where things do not have specific purpose, but in them many different themes or phenomena condense towards existence. The starting point can be some small event, a setting or a vision that is then being followed and combined with others. In the background the process is guided by a thought of the desired feeling in regards to the whole, that is cutting some things out and maybe calling others into being. It is perhaps part of that absence of the 'certain specific meaning' that things can at the same time evoke many different sensations.

M: Your works have a strong feeling of their own constructed universe, that has their own rules and qualities. I feel that the focus of your work is somehow in experimentation and play, and the results also

have humor in them? While at the same time a strong sensuality and sensitivity is present. Likewise, there is always experimentation involved and as I understood quite a lot of technical polishing. That mix for me is magical. Do you want to say something about this element of play, of experimentation?

And how do you work when you make videos, obviously with a minimal work group (if at all)? How much for example do you script or are the videos created more in the editing?

A: Atmosphere or mood/feeling is probably one of the most important metrics for me when I build works, I feel that it is a bridge through which all information and feelings travel in both directions between the work and the viewer. The atmosphere is why I try to be precise about the work's own world. In regards to the textures of image, sound and text there is a lot of searching for the right form that would communicate the right things. Atmosphere/emotion is a good guide for the process also because it does not command the content too precisely. Like in the case of this video new elements which surprised me came a part of it in the editing phase.

Humor perhaps comes mostly through the fact that the maker doesn't take themselves too seriously. You can do things seriously and consider them carefully, but not care about the rules, customs and expectations related to the form, or knowingly exceeding them. Maybe it's a kind of controlled loss of control.

It is partly the effect of meager resources that I have learned to do all kinds of things myself over the years, when hiring someone else to do it has not been an option. But I want to think that through it a peculiar and deep understanding of picture and sound has come into being. It can also make possible elements that could be difficult to do with a big production, such as aiming for certain types of weather conditions and in a specific place, or if you need to film animals that should behave naturally. You can test and make new up things if necessary, and add new elements much later even. It can however also be exhausting and endless work alone. I have also worked on a script intended for a larger working group, but in this scene one is not sure what to dare to dream.

M: It would be interesting to see what kind of work you would make with a big working group. Have you

thought about doing collaborations sometimes?

A: In the very beginning, the plan was actually to write this work with an author I admire, but as there was no funding yet, it got buried under other work things. But at least this video has some of the results of our music sessions in the middle, where you have the Buchla Easel shining through if I remember correctly.

M: You have a long history of working with music. You play in several bands and have directed music videos. Also in the Hippolyte's work music plays a big role. Do you want to say something about the influence of music on your visual art?

A: At least with my own videos, I think that the sound and the picture are on the same line, both can sort of act as the driving force. I like to create and collect sounds both electronically and with the so-called field recordings from the outside world. In this video the story caused quite heavy limits for the sounds and images that can be used, so the first mentioned method of creating played a bigger role. Some sounds were made with synthesizers found in the library here in Helsinki. No sound is from internet sound libraries, but that's maybe mostly because it feels faster to make the sound yourself rather than to look for it (in just the right form) from elsewhere. A certain sound can write a new scene to the video. Also in the editing I pay a lot of attention to the rhythm, even if there is no music in the video. Sound is also a good way to create uncertain sensations, although music is often used for the opposite.

A: Over the years, you have had some ready-made-style works where objects or tools that have a specific purpose are assigned to different meanings or connections which then brings about poetics that one maybe would not had associated with them otherwise. Do you have a favorite tool category or catalogue to study?

M: I understand why you use the term readymade, I myself often just talk about materials or found objects. The term readymade has such strong weight and history, and the questions it raises are often not the same as the ones I feel central to myself.

I recognize what you wrote about poetics. I think that the materials tune the space and create a kind of vocabulary. Sometimes I have said that I install mate-

rials in a space as I would write and I write as I would install materials in a space. I often repeat and reuse materials, slightly differently, and in that way also the materials are akin to language... something I search for meaning with.

I come across the materials through something, these days I don't search for certain imagery. I also currently watch a lot of youtube videos from a Chicago buying and selling store where people bring their treasures for sale.

Most important are just everyday environments, materials where something meaningful seems to inexplicably condense together or where I have a more intimate, for example autobiographical connection to them.

Because I am interested in all kinds of containers and storage containers and raw materials I have had a lot of e.g. hardware store stuff. Maybe some clarity and volume is the attraction in hardware stores... I haven't browsed Etra's catalogue for a long time, but that I can recommend.

In recent years for example various fabric materials have started to be more interesting, as well as the world of craft materials in Hobby Point. I also recently acquired a few books about Shaker furniture and tools - the simplicity and reduction, but on the other hand also the repeating same ways to "decorate" objects are fascinating, as well as functionalism which became deeply intertwined with their worldview. They feel like objects that have been charged with something.

A: How do I get beeswax off the bathroom floor?

M: You have to have patience, a hot blower and a roll of Scott Shop power paper towels. Another option would be to somehow freeze the wax, causing it to come off very easily.

I would like to ask something about how your videos often feature animals, but I can't find the right question. Do you want to say something about this topic? Top 3 animal actors/ movies with an animal in a role? Have you seen Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar*? (Sorry, I hope this not a dreary attempt)

A: I've seen *Balthazar* but I can't think of a clever comment about it right now. Animals are interesting

because of their inexhaustible otherness.

In movies you can often see dogs just still and rigid waiting for their instructor's orders, or otherwise looking a little nervous to be there. And movie popularity can be dangerous for the genetic health of dogs. Maybe because of those things the first pick could be very short passing animal roles, like the dog at the beginning of *Blue Velvet* who just sits on the sideboard of a fire engine slowly driving past the camera. The second could be unexpected animal cameos on the sides of the picture or in the background unintended. The third could be the surprisingly frequent animal references in George Eliot's books "- - stared at Deronda with glaring eyes that reminded him of a wondrous guinea pig, - -".

A: You have also made music yourself and you have had sound as part of works in exhibitions. How do you feel about sound? Does it also work as a part of the vocabulary like other materials? Are there some good things that you have heard recently? (Something like this?)

M: The only bigger sound installation was the *Recitation in Sinne 2023*, which was a sound and object installation with a ten-channel sound around the space. At least with those works the voices were like objects that I placed in space. In *Hippolyte* there is no sound present, but I have listened to e.g. the releases of the record label called *winds measure recordings*, in which there is often a lot of silence and very material sounds coming from everyday sources. Sam Dunscombe's "Two Forests", Moniek Darge's "Sounds Of Sacred Places" and "Dub Roots" by Prince Douglas have also been playing a lot.