

ZINE

Community-based Artwork

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Community Art Project in Me-talo

Me-talo is a community center for people living in the area of Multisilta and Peltolammi in Tampere. Me-talo arranges activities and place to spend time for children, but also social services for adults. The meaning of Me-talo is to support the wellbeing of people in the area, by providing these free services and bringing people together.

Every Thursday about twenty citizens of Multisilta and Peltolammi get together in Me-talo, eat together, talk and play some bingo. The place seems like an amazing opportunity to be social and meet other people. The feeling of a community can be felt after entering from the front door, when people are chatting and having nice time together.

Even though social encounterings are quite frightening these days, I feel like maintaining the activity of Me-talo is very crucial. Today people are lonelier than ever, and having a safe place to go and meet others might be the highlight of someone's day.



After meeting the people working in Me-talo for few times, I went to my first adults Thursday in the beginning of November 2020. My role in my community art project was to interview people in Me-talo. I wanted to record their childhood memories, something personal from their everyday life.

I started by observing people, looking for potential interviewees. The first encountering with a woman interested of art projects was quite frightening, since she started right away questioning how my project is art. She was more interested about visual arts and was not happy to talk about her childhood, so I had to move on to the next person. The two other woman I met that day were very kind, open and positive, and I got first two stories to my project.

The next week I felt a bit more stressed and nervous to go, as I had noticed last time that not everyone is open for this kind of project. After lunch I approached two woman who would have agreed to be interviewed, but they were in hurry to leave. After a while I approached two other women, who were open to my proposal. I felt these people were the most striking to me, as they told very personal and also sad stories from their childhood. This time the conversation went beyond my project, and I ended up staying for a long time with them after the interview, discussing normal everyday topics. These two women were not comfortable to have their portraits taken, and preferred to stay anonymous.

The third day came and then I started feeling the presence of the pandemic more than before in Me-talo. I was waiting for people to finish their meals, and all of the sudden everyone left, before even playing the bingo which was quite popular activity before. So, this day I did not get an interview, but instead I stayed talking with the people working in Me-talo for a longer time, and felt like gaining a closer relationship with them.

The role of the people working in Me-talo was to build some kind of a bridge between me and the visitors. The people visiting Me-talo trust the people working there, so hearing about me and my project from them might have felt more trustworthy and comfortable, than me approaching them out of the blue.



Having this kind of a project feels sometimes quite scary and stressful, but when finding the right people, it is very heart warming and rewarding.

It is hard to make a guideline for approaching people in a certain way with this kind of a project, since everyone are different and will react differently. Sometimes telling too much is a bad thing and the interviewee starts to tell stories before the recorder is on. Someone else might not be uncomfortable at all, and does not even need questions, as telling stories is so natural to them. Another person is not convinced and declines right away, or someone might simply be afraid to share personal and painful memories.

I solved this problem by approaching people in a very open way; asking if they have time and that I would be interested to hear about their childhood. I emphasized they can tell me whatever they feel comfortable to share.

I tried to make my questions as simple as I could, but it was interesting to see how people interpreted them very differently, as two people told what they wished to have when they were children, rather than telling what they have lost after childhood.



How was your childhood?

Do you have a happy memory you would like to share?

What have you lost from childhood, a feeling or a concrete thing that you don't have or can't reach anymore?

Of course, it was different when you were born in the country side. There was only skiing and going down the hill with a sledge. In the city you have hobbies, but in the countryside, there are none. But the time went fast.

We had two or three cows but we still needed to take milk to the dairy to get some money. But nowadays there are only big farms. I think someday there will be lack of food in Finland and we will again start to have smaller farms. When the world gets worse.

There were so many children in our family that you always received old clothes from someone else. When you were a bit bigger, then you got new cloths when the old ones did not fit.

I had a good mother, I can't say anything bad about her. I remember once when I was a child and my older brother had a baby. My mom was holding the baby and I asked if she could hold me too. I guess she just did not have time to hold us. But she was a good mother, I can't deny that.

Music was important in our family. My father played the violin, my brother played the violin and one brother played the accordion. Now he can't play because he had a stroke, he does not know how to play anymore. We always got together to sing when there was a festive day.

My older brother has died and my second oldest brother had died. Then there are me, my sister and the next brother has also died. All died to cancer. I also had cancer recently. But you heal, you don't give in.

My father's brother lived with us until I was born. Then he said he had to leave once my father started to have a kindergarten. He built a small house and lived there as a hermit for the rest of his life. He was really nice, we often went to visit him.

We did not have electricity at home, but we always had things to do. Time went by well. Nowadays there are phones, and as my grandchildren, children are always on the phones. The time will pass by doing other things as well. Parents should arrange it so that children could not always be on their phones. They miss out on so many experiences.

Summers were supposedly always sunny and beautiful. I don't remember anything bad, all that has been forgotten. People don't remember the bad things; it is good that it has been arranged so. I remember some thunderstorms though. Once there was such a bad one that even the cat hid under an old-fashioned hat when it was lightning.







I was born in 1944 in Kivennavan rantakylä. It must be gibberish to you? It is in Karjala that was left behind, it is part of Soviet Union today. And I was born there on 21th of May and as I have heard, 6th of June we left to evacuate. Everything was packed – or what could be fit on a horse – and I – three weeks old – was a white package on my mother's arms. And so we left to Central Finland. I have heard from my sister where we stopped on the way, but I don't remember anymore.

Then we came to our new home, Kangasla, Vääksynkylä. There was a small farm where I grew up and went to school, school of Huutijärvi. In the first day of school – my sister was fifteen years older than me and she was already married – my sister's husband took me to school with a motorcycle. I was sitting on the gas tank. But this was the only time for me. I never sat on a motorcycle again.

For the first and second grade I went to school in an old wooden building, then they made new, big school to Huutijärvi. I was an average student.

I always played at home grocery store, in a space under the stairs that led to our front door. I played it a lot and maybe that led to my career choice, I made my lifework in the field of sales.

We were skiing to school and the road was so narrow. It was cold. There were no mild winters like today. It was really freezing.

There was the mansion of Kerppola a bit further from our farm and they delivered milk with a van in the morning. The driver took us to sit between the milk churns, which would be absolutely forbidden today. But that is how we got to school, because the driver was taking milk to school.

We had a small farm, maybe seven cows, a horse, pigs and chickens. I kept pretty much out of the cowshed, I wasn't so interested in taking care of the cows. I was always playing with dolls and sewing clothes for them with an old Singer - and later to myself.

I was often sick, that I remember. When my older sister – there were three of us girls – who is eight years older than me came to visit from Tampere where she studied, was saying I'm always sick when she comes. And if I wasn't sick, one morning I had burnt my feet, I boiled the coffee on it. I was ten years old.

It feels so lovely that I was quite a daddy's girl. I have realized it now as an adult how much time I really spent with dad. I went fishing with him. If we went to Tampere to go shopping, we left our car to Rongankatu – the only street I knew from Tampere. Then we went to run errands and I was always with dad. Sometimes we bought us furniture, sometimes clothes – even for me.

I also remember how I rode a horse. Dad put me on the horse when it was brought from the field to our farm. It felt so lovely to sit on the horse. We had a lovely horse, Emma was her name, very kind horse. So, on her back I had the courage to be. Nowadays I'm scared of big horses.

One that stuck to my mind for life – and probably will never be forgotten – is when my sister's little daughter died to cancer in 1952. Our age difference was only four years. It has stayed in my mind forever, how a small child leaves. She was a special girl. She already knew how to read at the age of five. At that time there was no central hospital and she was treated in Helsinki. I remember the night she passed away. Then I told what had happened at school. We had a quite nice crafts teacher and she took the whole class to sing *Maan korvessa kulkevi lapsosen tie* to her grave.

I was not good at skiing. There were to Seppänen in our class. There was me, Maria Seppänen and Matti Seppänen. We were always last in the skiing contests. I never was good at skiing or other physical sports. Once we were skiing from school, and there was also a third one with us, Helmi and Helmi was a great at skiing. She was skiing with red cheeks. Then my ski broke and we were on the ice of Längelmävesi. I was thinking what should I do, one leg is falling to the snow and I have one ski. I went to the closest house; I knew the people well. I had gone there with my parents before. I went to tell what happened and the father from the house took his horse, harnessed it to a sledge and put me to the sledge and took me home. He lived a long life, over ninety years old. His daughter told me how he used to remember how she took the small Seppänen girl home. And I always said to her that tell him I'm not so small anymore.

I was in the choir and I was good at singing. Of course, it always obligated to stay at school after everyone else left home. But I went there until the end. On Mother's Day we used to have festivals at school, we picked flowers and put them with pins to our mothers' shirts. And I sang alone many times in those festivals.

I was pretty much alone as my siblings were a lot older than me. But we had neighbors, maybe half a kilometer away from us. I went there across a field, they had six children. So, there I always had a friend. Once the neighbor's boy washed my face with snow so badly that I almost choked. I have always remembered how he put so much snow on my face that I almost could not breathe anymore.

Girls at that time – me and everyone else – did not wear pants. We had wool socks attached with garters. Then I had woolpants. People today have such lovely clothes. And it is so nice girls can wear pants as well. I have photos when I am even skiing with a skirt. I don't understand why they did not realize to put pants on girls at that time. And the wool socks were horrible – I think mom had made them – really thick ones.

I was always longing to have a brother. I think it was so nice when others were bragging that their brothers are coming. I had no one, so I missed having someone close to me. When there is a big age difference with siblings, it is not the same. It remains distant. At least with us it did. I wished so much that I would have had a brother. Both of my sisters have died, so I'm the only one left now.



I lived in Kylmäkoski in the 70's. My family consisted of my grandparents - grandfather and grandmother - my parents, oldest half brother, one older brother, and two younger brothers. I was in the middle, so I kind of needed to stick up for myself. Of course, as a girl in the middle it was a bit challenging.

I was bullied at school for all nine years. I have been through all kinds of things; I was 11 or 12 when my grandfather abused me. Then my oldest brother found out and wanted his share. And again, I needed to stick up for myself even more.

I was two years in vocational school and applied to Ahlman, Tampere. I got in and here I stayed. In the same autumn I found a man for myself. We have been 31 years together.

I think it was Jokela's school shooting that happened at the time when I was in the vocational school and there was a big article in the newspaper. I went to the student counsellor with the newspaper, and said I could have been the shooter. At that moment I kind of felt that I have been bullied too, but I never did anything about it, just gave in. And now someone is starting to fulfil them, let traumas out. I went to psychologist for few times but we didn't really get along.

I have managed, tried to manage, stuck up for myself.

Nobody noticed how bad I felt. And I couldn't say it myself, the bullying and the incest. I couldn't say it and I was imagining that someone would see how bad I felt. So, it has bothered me, why no one noticed.

In a way there is something positive about it too. I now have three children and I have learnt to read them. I can see from their expressions and behavior right away if everything is not okay. We have these linguistic problems, so it takes them a while that they digest the thing and then they can tell me. I'm calling it the milker-technique. First I ask, see how their expressions are and if they can't say right away, I wait. It will come. And it always has. So, if I have lost something, I have also got something.

I have kind of forgotten if there has been something good. Because I have had so much these not-so-nice things. Basically, all the bad things have covered all the happy things. I don't remember them even though I have tried in older age, when I have been trying to stay alive.



I am from Tampere, I lived in Tahmela. My childhood was quite funny, because they didn't know who my father is. In the baptism certificate they put my brother's father and when I was three years old, they found out who my real father was.

My mom broke up with my brother's father and we were supposed to move in together with my dad. After all we did not move in together with him, he chose he's other family from Lempäälä. There I have a brother and a sister from my father's side.

We lived in Tahmela until I was six years old and then we moved to Tohloppi and my sister was born. Our family consisted on my mom, stepdad, my brother and my sister. From my father's side I was not in touch with anyone, until recently when they told me dad had died six months ago. They don't want to have anything to do with me, because they are angry because I was born, so they don't want me to their family. But quite complicated my life used to be back then. My sister's father was like a father to me then.

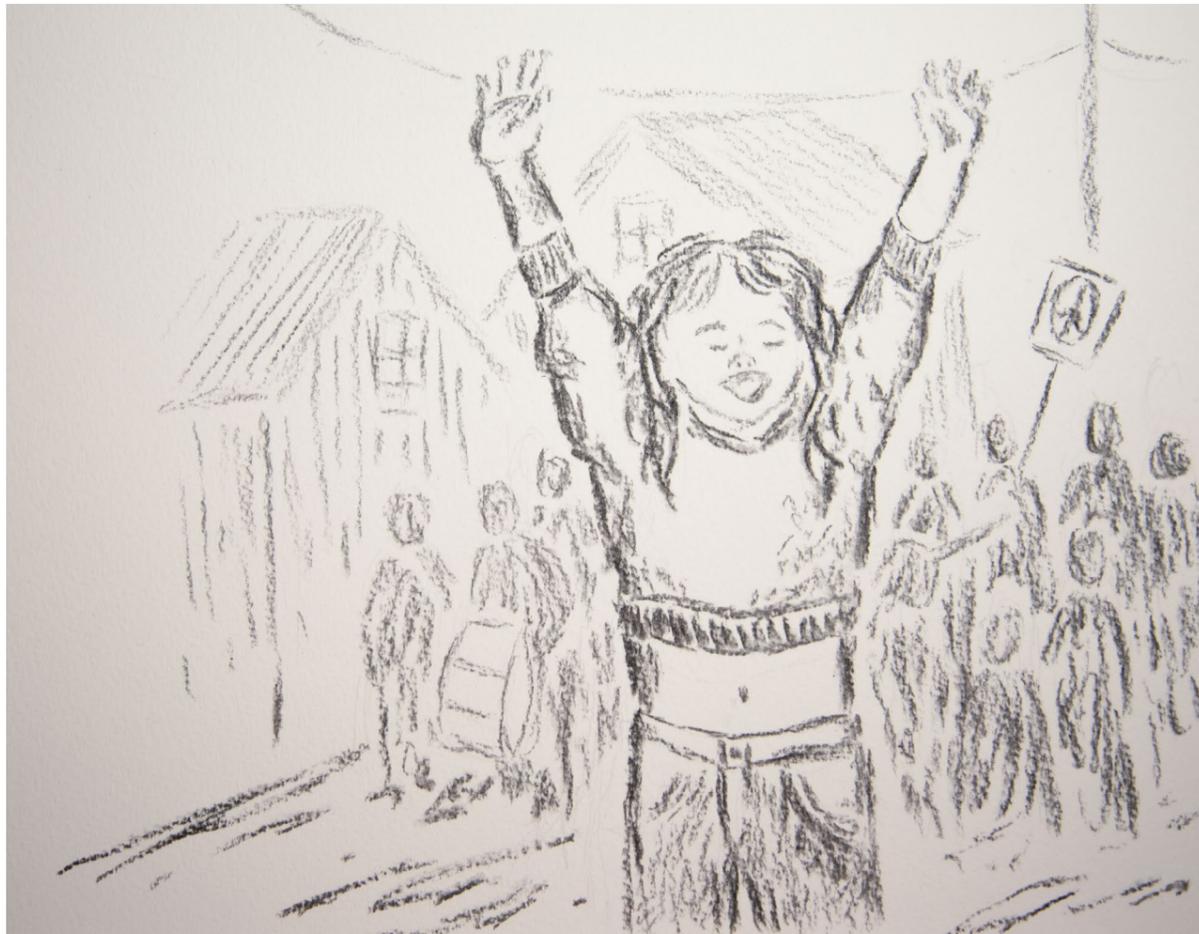
I had a nice childhood. I have nothing to complain.

My childhood had the feeling of safety that I still miss today. I was very small when I was walking on the streets of Tahmela and if I went further the neighbours called my mom, that Minna is here now. That is how my childhood was like in Tahlema, and even in Tohloppi also, it felt very safe.

Now I'm scared for my own children when they are out there. We used to be outside with our friends, and now children are sitting inside all day. I have tried with my own children that we play board games, so that it is not just videogames all the time. When we are at the cottage we forget totally about our phones. There is not even electricity, so there is not a place to charge them anyway. There we do all kinds of things outside, the things I used to do as a child. And it is good they can do it there, there are no friends seeing and thinking that 'why are you doing that and not standing at the super market.' We are doing this with the kids so they can be freely and do all kinds of things.

I remember when I ran away with two punk rockers, I was six years old. I went to the Carnival in Pispala. There were always the carnival and I remember how a photo was taken of me and that is how my mom found out. Our neighbors came to my mom saying that there is a photo of Minna in a photography exhibition. My mom was trying to think where the picture has been taken and then she noticed it said the Carnival of Pispala below. Then she found out I had run away with those punk rockers.

I think the photo was still few years ago in the wall of Pispalan Pulteri. I still remember the moment when I had my hands up and my shirt rose so that you could see my belly button. That is why the photo ended up to the exhibition. This is a memory that I remember, it was a funny story. There are many others, but this one I like to remember.





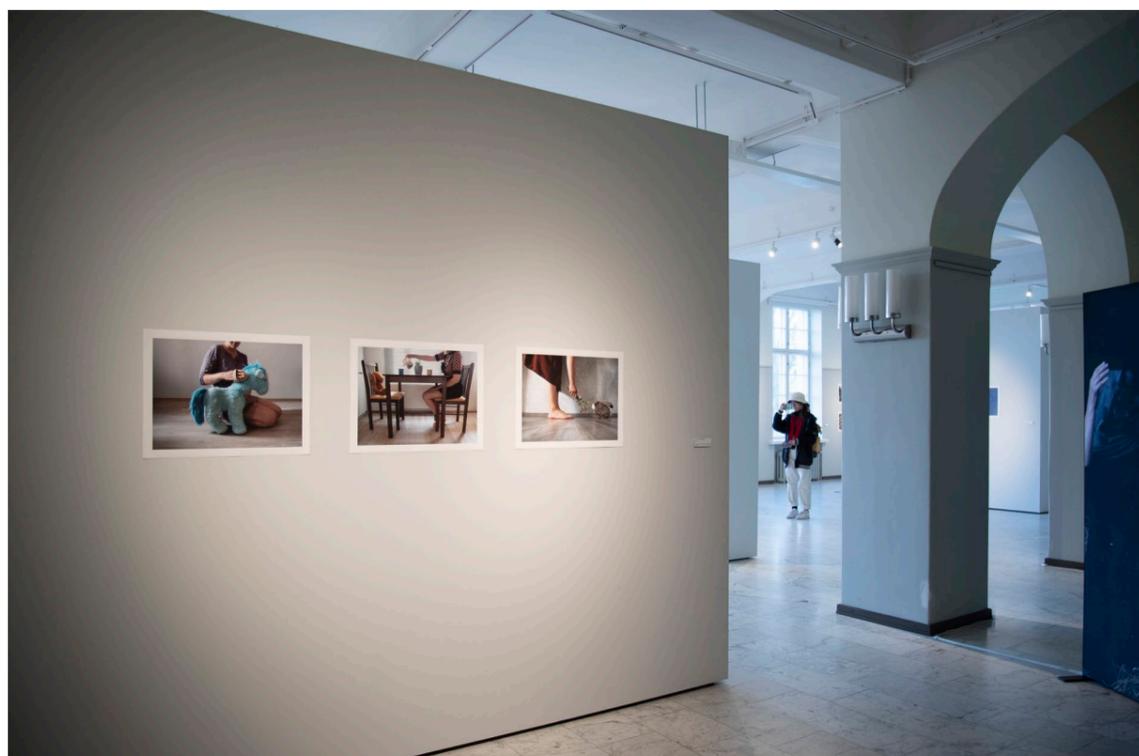
The result of the project is a very emotional and personal audio piece, telling about childhood of four anonymous people. The stories tell the most memorable happenings, what was missing from their childhood, what they wish to have still today, and how childhood has affected to their adulthood.

Even though the outcome of the project is different than I expected, I still feel that I succeeded. I gained the trust of four people I had never met before, and immortalized something very personal about them.

The most important thing I learnt during this course, is how as an artist I can find communities and people for my projects, by approaching places like Me-talo. In the future I will also be more confident to approach people I don't know. I had positive experiences but also a refusal, so I can be prepared for both reactions.

In the future I will try to be even more specific if I wish to have an answer to one specific question, and maybe arrange more meeting with one person to get deeper and to gain their full trust.

As I already discussed with Me-talo, I would be very interested to continue my project in and be involved in their activity. Even one of the women I met was open to continue collaborating with me, by continuing the interview even deeper. Thus, I feel like this course was very important when thinking about my future projects.



Art Affected – Opening The exhibition

Visual Catalysts exhibition was opened in September 2020 in Kulttuuritalo Laikku, presenting 37 international artists as a part of the Backlight 2020 Photo Festival. The exhibition highlights affecting visually with themes of circular economy and sustainability in a new way. The artists are divided into four categories; new ways of seeing, new ways of being social, new types of agency and critique of materialism. The exhibition has a large variety of different artworks, filling the exhibition spaces of Laikku. The point of views the exhibition gives, can make the viewer very aware of the topic; to see how many aspects are affected by our behavior in our planet.



Together with my colleagues Jasmin Gams and Elina Kinnunen we met in October 2020 to discuss about the Visual Catalyst exhibition. In making Art Affected – Opening the exhibition my role was to make research about the artists of the exhibition and make a structure for the podcast. Elina Kinnunen was our sound editor, creating the final form of the podcast and Jasmin Gams was our graphic designer creating our logo.

The outcome of our discussion was a critical but positive podcast. We wanted to bring up the most relevant artists for us and create a discussion of their work and methods. We analyzed the installing of the exhibition and curating of the artists. We also wanted to discuss about certain elements that need to be considered when making an exhibition during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it was taken into account in Visual Catalysts exhibition.

With our podcast we wanted to go through all aspects of the exhibition, but also spread awareness about cultural events. Many people who are not so interested about art, don't always know galleries are mostly free to enter, and the advertising of an event doesn't always reach new people. During the pandemic many might also avoid public spaces, when no knowing how the pandemic is taken into account there.



During our project I learnt how crucial it is to plan a podcast beforehand. Having a structure for our discussion made it easy not to get lost into topics that would be too far of the original themes. I also realized how great podcast is as a tool. It is easier to make a heavy topic interesting as an audio, comparing if the same would be as a long text. Podcasts are very used these days, and finding listeners would maybe be easier than finding readers.

This project made me consider using podcasts as a research material, as I realized there are so many different podcasts available. I also realized making a podcast is not so complicated and require a certain outgoing personality. Thus, in the future I will be very open to use podcast as a tool to discuss art related topics, or even my own works.

All interviews can be listened in Finnish at jannalindfors.com