

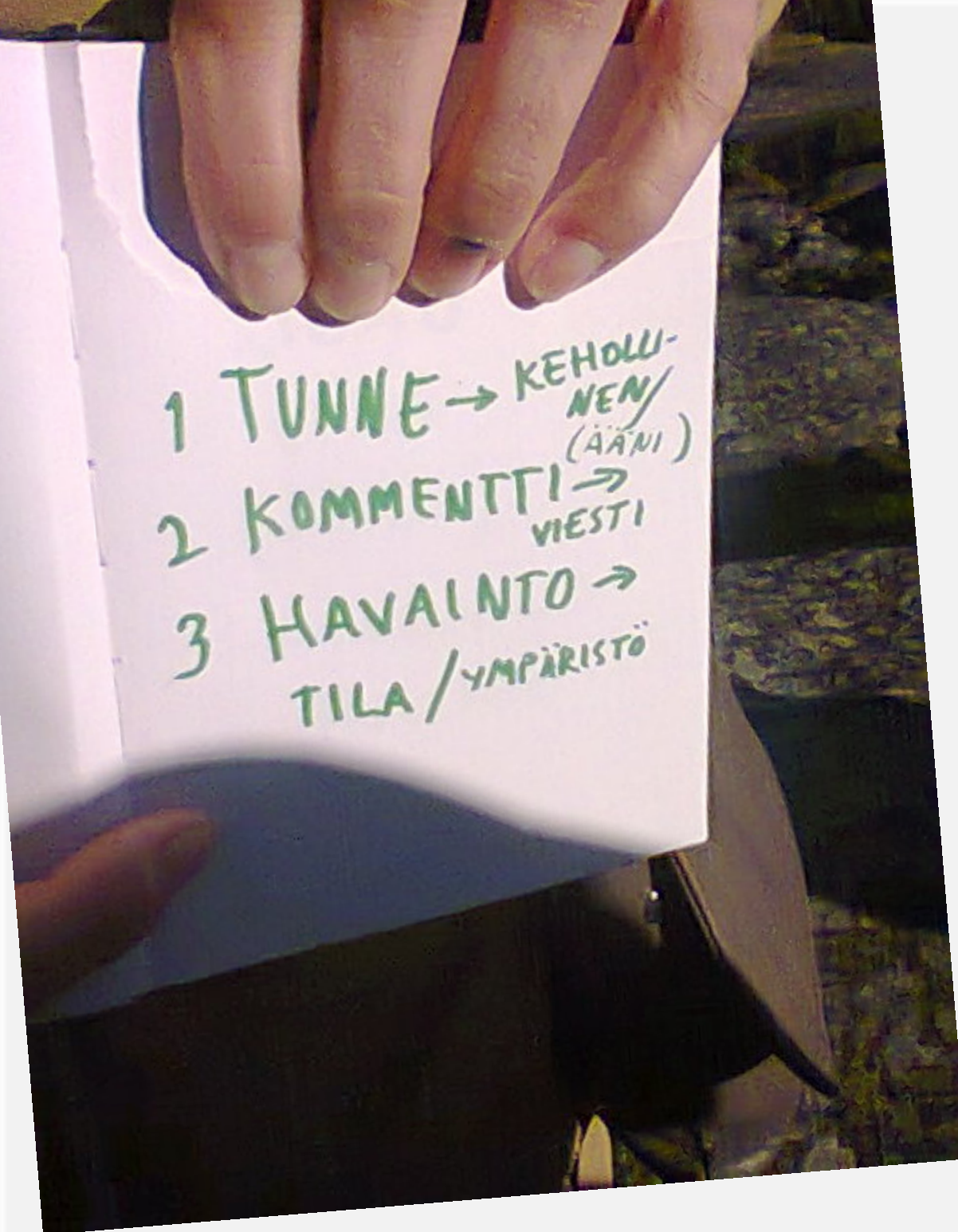


AALTO UNIVERSITY

Changing the Course of Art Education Students' Art Studies in Aalto University

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Images 1 & 2: Intensive workshop in extraordinary surroundings of Vasikkasaari Island was planned to create a committed working environment and start the students' working processes.
Photographs: Minna Suoniemi

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Abstract

The Finnish visual art teacher education turned 100 years old in 2015. The centennial was a good opportunity to reflect the past and current practices of art studio teaching for pre-service art educators. It is clear that art has played diversified roles in the history of art teaching. For example, in the 1970s, mass media images and visual communication were more interesting for some art teachers and art educators than art. In the 1980s and 1990s, art studio studies were in the core of art teachers' education and many students "disappeared" in art studios for many years during their study time. The times have changed. In this article, we describe the changes of contemporary art teaching for pre-service art teachers in Aalto University's art education program. We discuss especially the art pedagogical principles of art teacher and artist Minna Suoniemi. We explore one art project example and offer visual materials from other art education students. The artistic processes were exhibited as part of 100-year art teacher education celebration during the spring 2015 in Helsinki.

Keywords: Contemporary art education, inquiry-based art teaching, issue-based art teaching, phenomenon-based education



Images 3 - 5: Installing work in a process-based exhibition in Node Space in 2014.
Photographs: Venla Helenius & Hanna Meriläinen

Images 6 & 7: Jani Nummela's Installation, Node Space, 2014.
Photographs: Jani Nummela



What are then the current practices of contemporary art education? What has changed and what has been important to preserve in the hundred years of art teaching for art education students? Learning to see and perceive, and the ability to ask important and critical questions are still as relevant as always. However, the practices and approaches have been changed within the past 100 years. Art learning is closely contextualized to relevant contemporary art practices and students are encouraged to apply inquiry-based working. In this visual essay we present current artistic processes, and focus on one example, represented in one of the two exhibitions during the celebration of the hundred years of Finnish art teacher education (see Lintunen & Helenius, 2015). As Kallio-Tavin (2015) stated, “contemporary art deals with rich content and layers, exploring social, political and cultural issues, among other topics, using methods and strategies, and choosing materials, differently and from different reasons than art teaching in schools has traditionally often done” (p. 23). Art education students are encouraged to view contemporary art in different contexts and to understand it in relation to art history, societal and political discourses, popular culture, and different practices in visual culture. Contemporary art is the core context and source of vivid material, which is directly related to society and its politics, environment, visual culture, and so on. The substance knowledge needs to be solidly grounded. This requires, in addition to following current conversations both in art and art education, viewing diverse forms of arts (such as visual art, documentaries, films, performances, contemporary dance and theater). Similarly, as it is important to know the

literature and theory of the field, it is crucial to know the field of art, since as much as academic texts refer to other academic texts, works of art refer to other works of art.

One of the main skills of contemporary art teacher might be the skill of possessing visual language and conceptual thinking. These skills develop, according to the teaching philosophy practiced in contemporary art education, through making and looking at art, together with reading, writing and conversations about art and society. In this process, students’ art production is contextualized within contemporary art, which makes it relevant and interesting for the students, and forces students to contemplate the question *why* they choose the particular means of artistic and visual practices. It is important to ponder *why* this (one’s own or other’s) artwork was made, in which context, *why* this particular artwork is meaningful for me and what could it mean to others or society. A research-based and experimental approach helps to deliberate from the tradition of “assignment-based” thinking. Artistic processes need to rely on students’ own motivations and commitment. However, when students choose their own theme and approach, the commitment often appears to be quite strong.



Joonas Suomalainen: *Casual Propositions*, series of 3 interactive situations, Node Space, 2014.
Photograph: Venia Helenius

Commitment is important also as a pedagogical approach, when we define learning as a dialogical process. This approach emphasizes an appreciative and trustful environment to enable learning. All questions are welcomed and wondering and seeking are encouraged. It is relevant to ask: What can you see in the artwork? What types of citations and agencies can you recognize? What does this artwork mean to you? Why was it made and, how do you understand it? It is important not to rush to offer explanations from the teacher's position, but to let the conversation develop through students' collective dialogic thinking process. This type of critical gaze and analysis is especially important when discussing students' own artworks (Tavin, 2009). In practice, while the students are in a process of producing own art projects, their material is constantly being discussed in class: What can be seen or experienced? What do the other students see? How do they interpret what they are experiencing? And, what kind of agencies do they recognize? While students hear different interpretations of their own work from other students (which might be completely different from their own intentions) they learn to view, see and understand visual language and build critical visual signifiers.

The art pedagogical ideology presented here is close to the phenomenon-based approach, which is one of the main core visions for the Finnish educational developments. Phenomenon-based learning challenges the idea that student's thinking needs to be organized around separate singular school subjects, while the world seems to be much more complex than that. This type of work requires teachers' collaboration and a

student-led investigation, with students playing an important role in recognizing their own needs in filling the gaps in their knowledge. This attitude is quite similar to contemporary artists' practices and contemporary art strategies (Marshall, 2011). Since it is impossible to govern everything within visual art education, the phenomenon-based approach offers an investigative strategy instead of anxiety around all the different methods, theories, materials, readings, tools and techniques that art teachers sometimes feel they need to be able to cover. While it is important to be able to possess the "tools", they should never become a value per se. Next we will introduce the artistic project by art education student Jani Nummela.

An ongoing process from *Boys of Summer* to *Pervert Art*

When pondering the starting perspectives for his artistic work process, Nummela emphasized the effort to develop private topics into public themes. In his undergraduate thesis he focused on teenage homosexual identification to female film characters. TV and films influenced him strongly as teenager, and he wanted to make these experiences visible to the wider audience through his art. As artistic influence and source, he mentions Candice Breitz's artwork and especially *Babel series* and *Soliloquy trilogy*. Nummela finds it interesting how Breitz uses popular culture as her material and artistic method. For example, in *Soliloquy trilogy*, Breitz has edited out from the original movie everything but the main character's lines, hence producing a long monologue.

Minna Suoniemi's performative intervention during the exhibition opening in Node Space



A discussion about the students' processes with a visiting artist and lecturer Andy Best



A discussion about the students' processes with a visiting artist and lecturer Andy Best



Video Stills from White Horses, a video installation by Anniina Ala-Ruona and Venla Helenius



Minna Suoniemi's performative intervention during the exhibition opening in Node Space



Video Stills from *White Horses*, a video installation by Anniina Ala-Ruona and Venla Helenius





Installing work in Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition at an empty store space in Kamppi shopping center, 2015



Images 9 & 10: Minna Suoniemi's performative intervention during the exhibition opening in Node Space, 2014. Photographs: Venla Helenius

Images 11 and 12: A discussion about the students' processes with a visiting artist and lecturer Andy Best. Photographs: Venla Helenius

Images 13 and 14: Video Stills from White Horses, a video installation by Anniina Ala-Ruona and Venla Helenius. Photographs: Venla Helenius

Images 15 and 16: Installing work in Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition at an empty store space in Kamppi shopping center, 2015. Photographs: Neonilla Narjus

Image 17 (next page): Site specific participatory performance You and I, Sini Anttila-Rodriguez, Oleg Donner, Salla Keskinen, Jenna Saarinen, Milja-Maaria Terho, Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus



Site specific participatory performance You and I, Sini Anttila-Rodriguez, Oleg Donner, Salla Keskinen, Jenna Saarinen, Milja-Maaria Terho, Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition, 2015



Image 18: Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition opening, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus



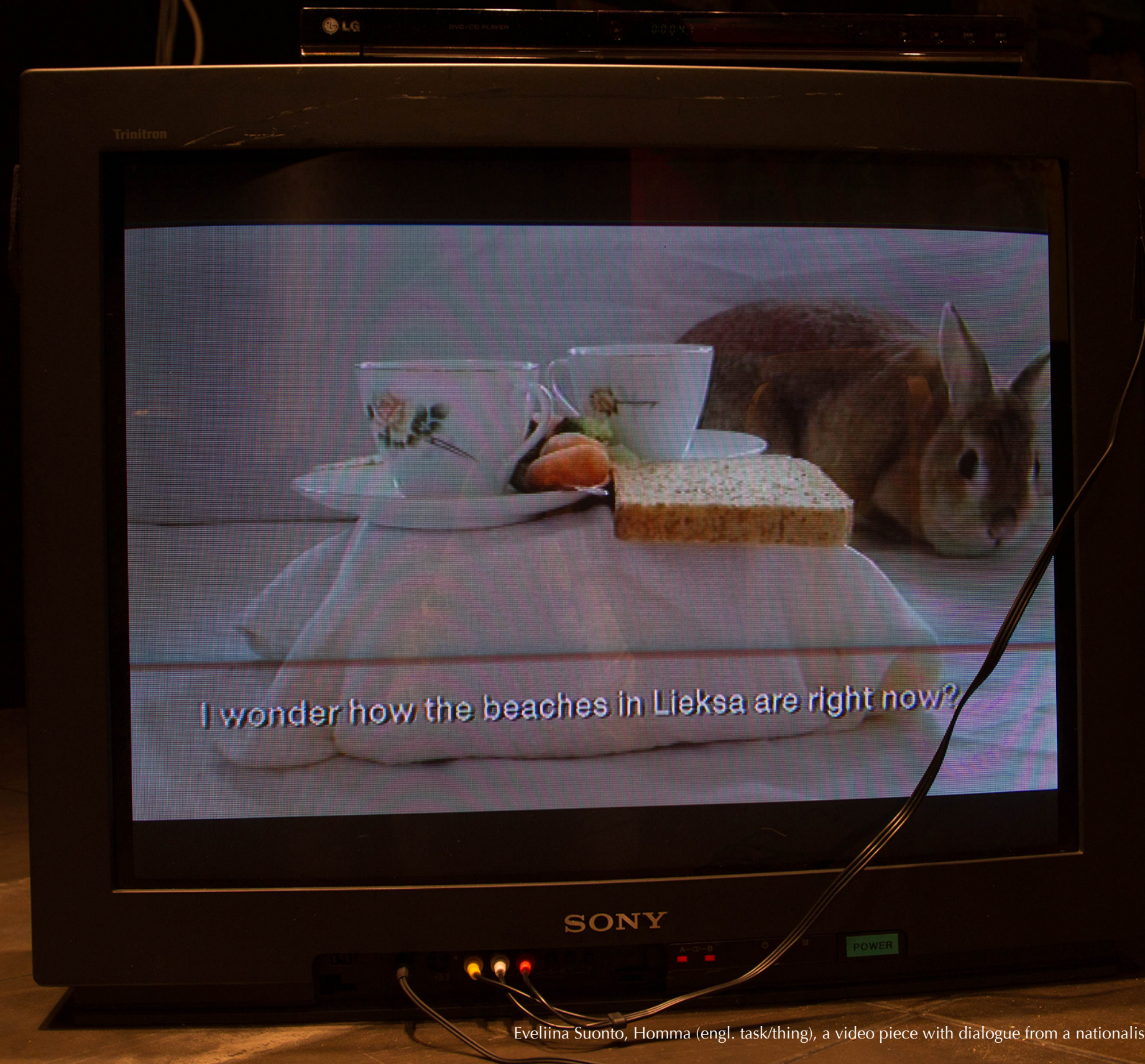
Performances by Nussivat pääskyset, a visually, politically and ideologically polyphonic rapid reaction group of four artists, in Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition, 2015



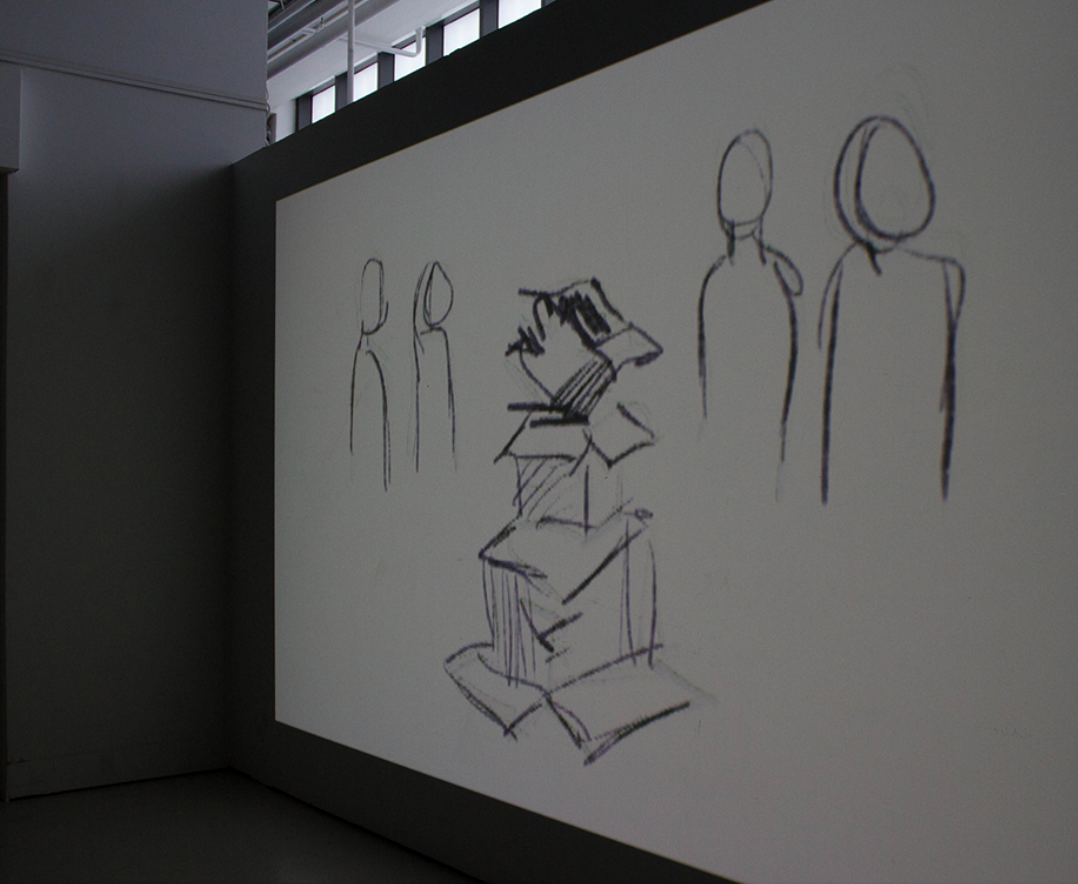
Students performing in Kamppi Shopping center in Security guards' uniforms creating a remake of Otto Karvonen's Security Flip Shifty, a commissioned piece by Kiasma Museum of Contemporary art.

Image 19: Performance by Nussivat pääskyset, a visually, politically and ideologically polyphonic rapid reaction group of four artists, in Kuvis1000kamppi Exhibition, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Image 20: Students performing in Kamppi Shopping center in Security guards' uniforms creating a remake of Otto Karvonen's Security Flip Shifty, a commissioned piece by Kiasma Museum of Contemporary art. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus



Eveliina Suonto, Homma (engl. task/thing), a video piece with dialogue from a nationalist internet forum (Homma Forum), 2015.

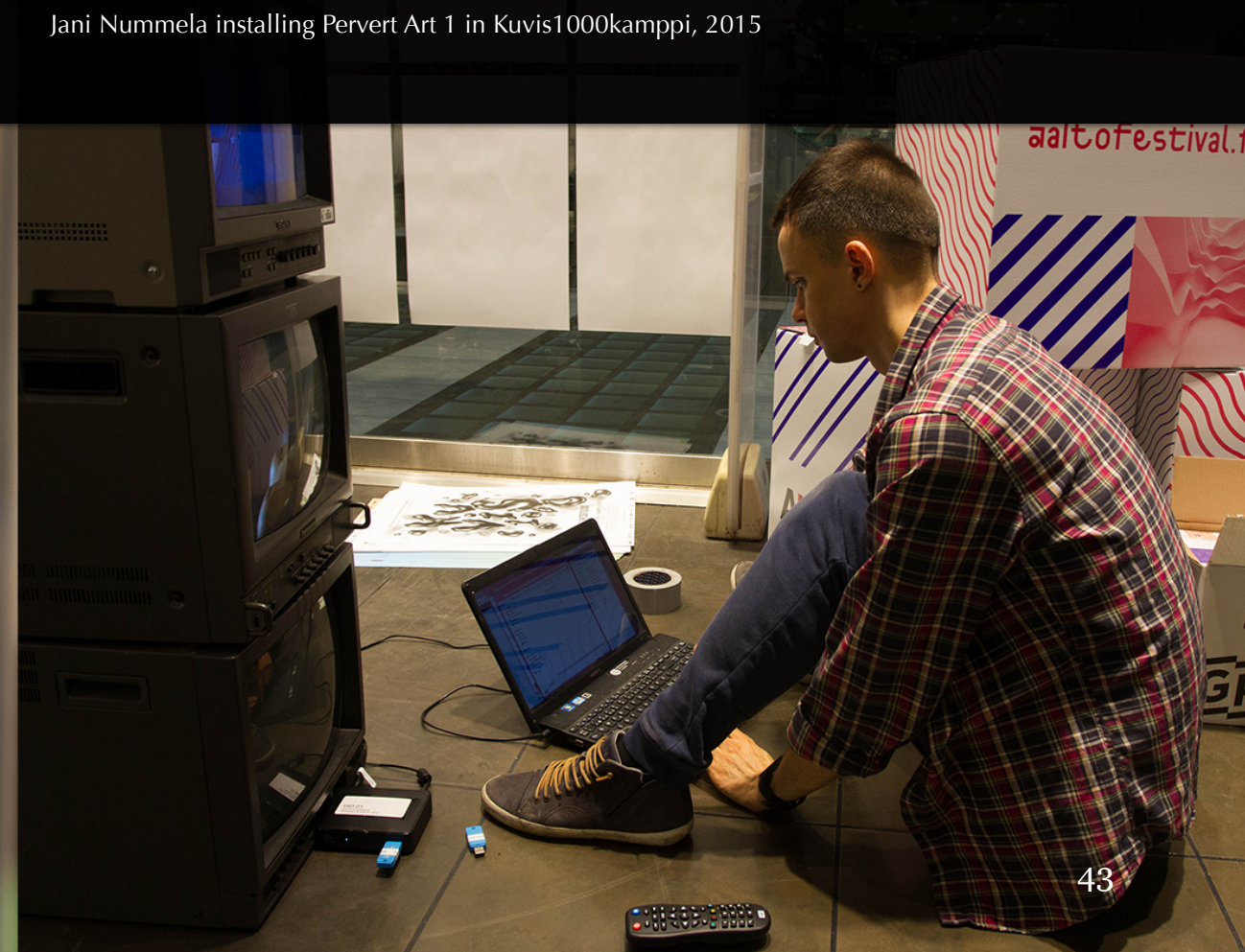
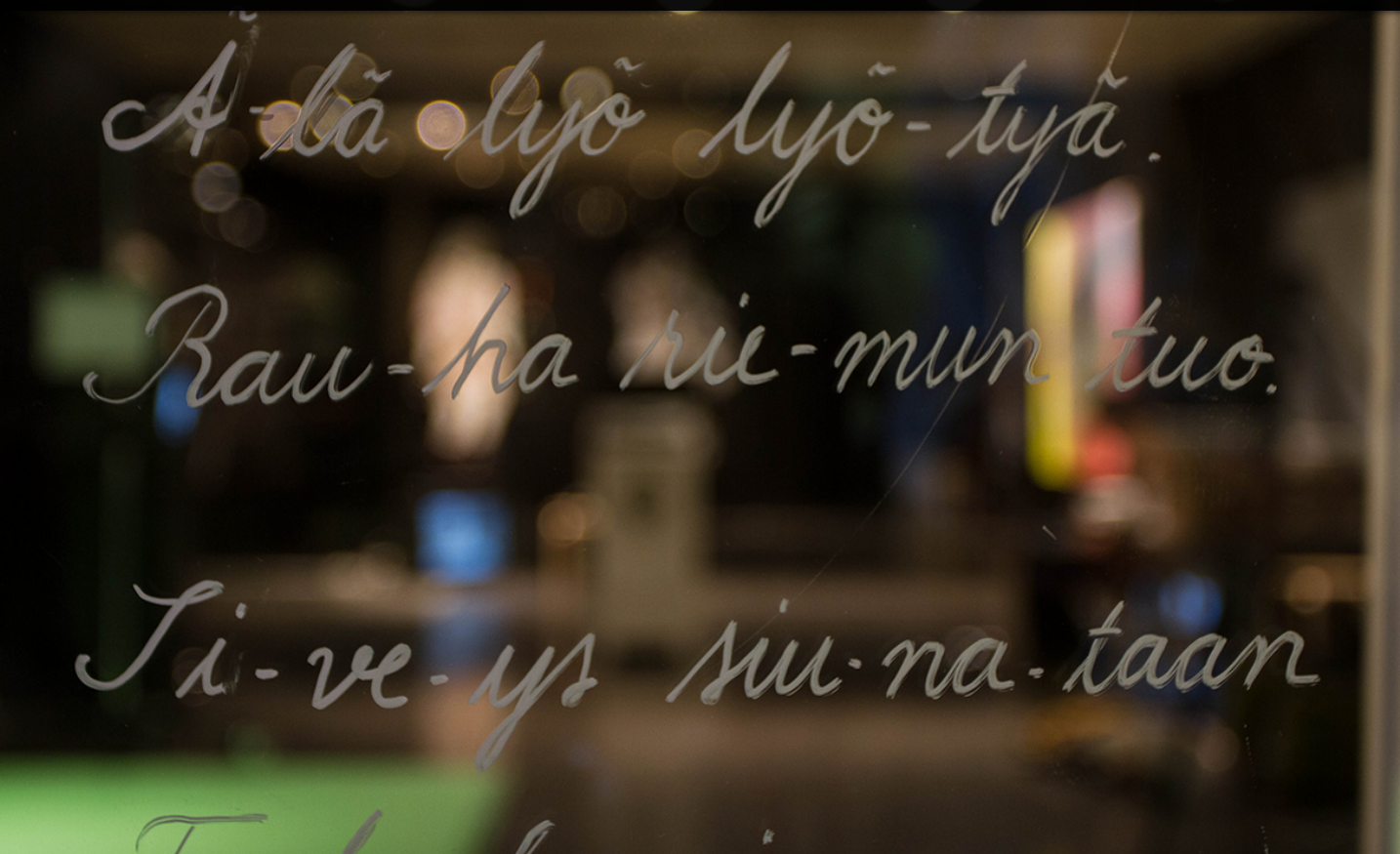


Lina Nokelainen's rotoscope animation Blog posts, 2015.

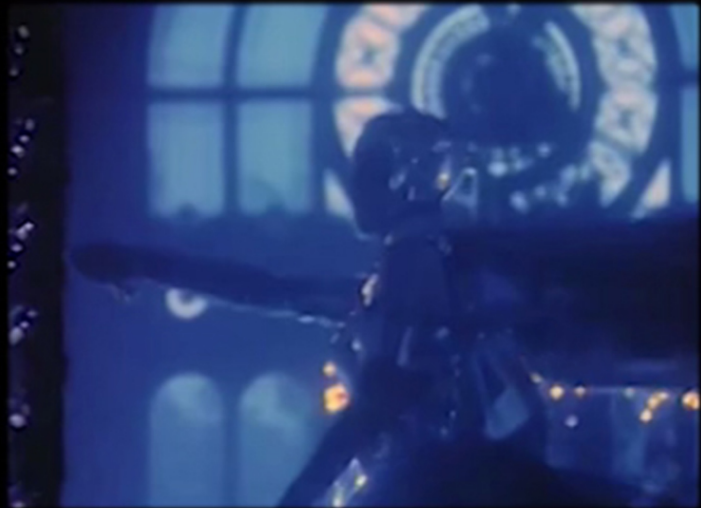


Sari Silvo's experimental video installation Afterparty - only for the selected ones, 2015.

Outi Koivisto's Hard work shall overcome misfortune, written school workbook texts and passages of Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish on the shop window, 2015



Jani Nummela installing Pervert Art 1 in Kuvvis1000kamppi, 2015



Jani Nummela's Pervert Art 1, 5-channel video installation with sound, 2015



Jani Nummela's Pervert Art 1, 5-channel video installation with sound, 2015

Image 21: Eveliina Suonto, Homma (engl. task/thing), a video piece with dialogue from a nationalist internet forum (Homma Forum), 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Image 22: Iina Nokelainen's rotoscope animation Blog posts, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Image 23: Outi Koivisto's Hard work shall overcome misfortune, written school workbook texts and passages of Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish on the shop window, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Image 24: Sari Silvo's experimental video installation Afterparty - only for the selected ones, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Image 25: Jani Nummela installing Pervert Art 1 in Kuvis1000kamppi, 2015. Photograph: Neonilla Narjus

Images 26 and 27: Jani Nummela's Pervert Art 1, 5-channel video installation with sound, 2015. Photographs: Jani Nummela

When describing the actual artistic process, Nummela mentions his interest toward using popular culture material, such as music videos and commercials, and developing his ideas based on editing existing materials. Seeing artistic examples encouraged him to continue with his ideas. He first tested the method and made versions. These tests shaped his artistic thinking and effected in how he continued editing his material. Some seemed better than others, but nothing seemed sufficient to exhibit. Working on existing video material made the artistic process first seem too easy. He decided that instead of focusing on “overdoing” one singular piece, he included several draft-type edits into a video installation to be able to allow space for coincidences. This made it possible to include different layers, voices and perspectives to the artwork, and hence emphasize un-finished and open-ended artistic process.

The first piece turned out to be an installation, including an image modified from the Superman strip where the Superman has been edited out, a letter written as a child to a lost friend, and a video entitled *Boys of Summer*. The video consists of edited material of men and boys, which Nummela had found beautiful as a teenager. The installation speaks on longing, absence and admiration, mixing layers from early childhood emotions to teenage and adult erotic, and romantic homosexual fantasies. Later on, the video *Boys of Summer* was included into a larger video installation, *Pervert Art*. For this video Nummela edited material based on his teenage visual fantasies, represented through popular culture imaginaries of that time. In this installation, five videos, which differ from their

length, loop randomly and hence every reviewing experience is different. For Nummela, this artwork represents namely images in process and an effort to include coincidence into a video artwork process when the images and their themes are more important than their form.

Nummela’s work can be seen as an example of a critical artistic process in which the piece both reflects personal experience and forms a visual research about constructed and loaded media representations of what it means to be a young man. Thus, Nummela’s artistic working process can be seen as an exploration of a certain phenomenon, to which he has a very personal relation and motivation. For us, it serves as a good example of practiced contemporary art pedagogy, where societal and cultural phenomena are contemplated using conceptual thinking through artistic language.

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