



# Children's Cultural Centre Play, Interaction, Experiences – Exhibitions for Children in Annantalo

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## Play, Interaction, Experiences – Exhibitions for Children in Annantalo

### Abstract

What is a good exhibition for children? How can an exhibition support the art educational task we have? What do we learn in exhibitions and how?

From the viewpoint of a cultural center for children and youth I give some answers:

1. There has to be a connection with the content and the form of the exhibition and the everyday life of its audience, the children.
2. Build up nice atmosphere and possibility for social interaction and play.
3. Give possibilities for participation in the exhibition.

4. Invite children and youth also to produce exhibitions.

5. Connect children exhibitions to the bigger picture, art world and society. Collaborate!

Annantalo is an arts center for children and young people in Helsinki. Annantalo offers art education, exhibitions, performances and events for individual children, youth and families as well as school and kindergarten groups. You can read more on Annantalo and its programmes:

<http://www.annantalo.fi/en/home>

In this visual essay I concentrate especially on studying and describing the exhibition programme, and the principles guiding the exhibition planning in Annantalo. Since Annantalo was opened as an art center for children and young people in 1987, there has been a strong and lively exhibition programme. We have 10-15 exhibitions and 30 000 – 50 000 visitors in them every year.

In Annantalo's exhibitions there is always an educational point and a connection to children's culture and life. Very often there are interactive parts in the exhibitions, too. You have to be able to investigate and experience through multiple senses as well as be active and take part in the exhibition! Annantalo

also displays its own students' work on a regular basis.

Over the years we have also questioned the role of the exhibitions in Annantalo. What is a good exhibition for children? How can an exhibition support the art educational task we have? What do we learn in exhibitions and how?

I know that lots of museums, galleries and other institutions are asking the same questions when planning services for their young audiences. Here are some answers.

**Keywords:** art center, exhibition, participation, art

### Connection to the world and life of children

To answer the question: "Why should this exhibition be presented in Annantalo?", there has to be a connection with the content and the form of the exhibition and our every-day audience, the children.

*Annantalo has a long tradition of exhibitions on children's literature. These exhibitions open up the world of the*



books and storytelling in an active way. This picture is from the exhibition “BY – Once upon a time there was a village” (22/11/2015-28/2/2016 in Annantalo) where nine Finnish childrens books illustrators presented their work in a playful and interactive way.



Pictures: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo

In his exhibition “Father Made it of Wood” (29/4/2015-12/6/2015 in Annantalo) artist Aleksi Tolonen studied his own childhood memories and experiences as a father in a playful installation where he used a lot of toys and also studied the concept of identity and growing up. In the picture visitors in the exhibition.



Picture: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo



## Nice atmosphere, social interaction and play

Often the art center as well as museums or other exhibitions are places where children and adults share time, thoughts and experiences in surroundings that are away from the everyday life. It is a chance for both the parent (or grandparent, aunt, uncle, friend, etc.) and the child to see things from a different perspective.

*The Children's Book Café in Annantalo provides many books to read and images (book illustration exhibitions) to watch. It serves as a place of relaxation and having a break. In my experience it is as important, what a child and adult see and share on the way to the exhibition or on the breaks there, as what they experience in the exhibition or event they have come for. This is why the cafeteria is an important art educational space to Annantalo as well as to many museums and galleries.*

*In the installation Revolution! (24/3/2016-12/6/2016 in Annantalo) Hanna Ryti and her working group let the children control and explore the space the way they wished. Revolution! was an exhibition that one could experience with your body. It was about power and asking about what is appropriate. Must there always be rules for things to work? Who gets to decide? Is an adult's opinion always more correct than a child's? Targeted at children and adults, the exhibition encouraged dialogue. One part of the installation was a pool filled with candy papers and a wall picturing people with power.*



Pictures: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo





**Nice atmosphere,  
social interaction  
and play**

Picture: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo



## Active role of the visitor: making, trying, experiencing

In children's exhibitions in Annantalo there must be possibilities for participation. It can be multisensory ways of experiencing an art work, trying materials, or producing parts of the exhibition. Many museums have set in activity spaces or workshops in their exhibitions. Sometimes, as oftentimes found in science centers, the whole exhibition can be interactive. Sometimes you have to limit the action to certain areas in order to be able to present original art pieces.

*In The Animakers –exhibition (21/8/2014-18/01/2014 in Annantalo) the idea was to make an interactive animation exhibition on the history of Finnish animation. There were open workshops for making animations as well as activity points, where you could see and try the principles of film making.*

Pictures: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo







*Playing with toy-cars and building race course for them has always been a favourite play of children. This picture is from an event that grew up to an installation or exhibition since the courses were left in the space for other visitors to use and enjoy. The event was a family event of the Art Clinic workshops (11/10/2015) and called "Go for it!"*





*Veijo Setälä's sculpture/ installation "The Last Dolphin" (4/11/2015-17/1/2016 in Annantalo) could be touched and made a whole when you moved your hand above it or on its surface. It hummed quietly and pulled children to pet and listen and relax on it.*

Picture: Päivi Setälä





Picture: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo

## Producing exhibitions, being an artist

In museum settings can be a bit problematic to set up the work of visitors next to the art from the museum collection. Recent years have brought the practices of participation in the museums and it is not uncommon to see children's work on the museum walls. Also the concept and practices of community art has changed this. For children's art centers like Annantalo this has never been a problem. There is a tradition of spring exhibitions of the art classes here. We have also invited children and youth to exhibit their own work in thematic project exhibitions.

*"Just a dream?" exhibition (29/4/2015-12.6.2015 in Annantalo) consisted of young people's ideas about the future, themselves and the world they live in. They had worked in several workshops throughout the school year and their ideas were put up uncensored and discussed by the audience. In order to warn part of the audience about the content of the exhibition we had to put*



## **HUOM!**

Näyttely sisältää nuorten sensuroimattomia ajatuksia maailmasta.

*the age of eighteen. Young artist and musician of eighteen. Young artist and musician Heta Aho had her "Step into the room" (01/03/2013-27/03/2013) exhibition as an open studio installation where she presented her paintings, writings and music. This kind of closes the circle, gives a proper end to the process of art studies in Annantalo for the young artists.*

Pictures: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo

*up a sign: "Warning! In the exhibition there are uncensored thoughts of the world by the young."*

*Some of the students have been taking part of the art classes in Annantalo for years. There is a possibility for these students to get the first solo show in Annantalo as they finish their studies at*







Picture: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo

## Being part of the “big picture” and the real art world

Participation, play, interaction and children’s experiences make the child visitor of Annantalo exhibitions a strong, active subject. However, the exhibitions are also windows to the work and life of others. So, there is always a connection to the bigger picture, the art world in Annantalo exhibitions. There have been exhibitions by top artists and international connections in Annantalo exhibition spaces.

*A few examples are Leonardo da Vinci’s Flying machines in Annantalo in 2005 in and Alexanders Reichstein’s installation in connection with the big Picasso exhibition in 2012.*

## References

Annantalo retrieved from <http://www.annantalo.fi/en/home>





Picture: Mauri Tahvonen, Annantalo