



**IMAG::
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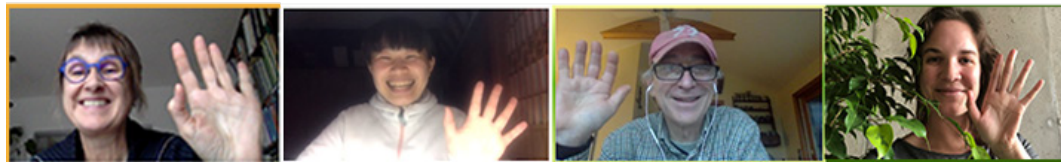
RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING

Re-charging the IMAGination

As artists and educators, we continually find ways to energize and invigorate our practice. Now, as we strive to make sense of unprecedented global events that have uprooted our routines we are at new beginnings compelled to again witness the power of art to bring us hope, joy, and meaning. In this issue we present visual essays that have demonstrated novel and innovative ways that artists, educators, and community members recharge as an active commitment to revitalize the imagination and sense of wonder. These essays illuminate how visual language and aesthetic experience brings optimism and resilience into the creative process. By exploring the unexplored they refresh the imagination of self, learners, and community members.

As newly appointed co-editors we are also at new beginnings exploring the unexplored and honored to present this, our first issue. We are grateful to Teresa Eca who pioneered and edited IMAG through these past seven years and to graphic designer Angela Saldanha for her keen dedication and vision. We hope to follow their path to Re-charge Imaginations for our readers through many upcoming IMAG issues.

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GABRIELLAPataky

MAHOSato

JONATHANSilverman

VIOLAREkvenyi

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IMAG issue 11 **RESILIENCY THROUGH ARTMAKING**

The first issue by the **IMAG QUARTET** ::

Principal Editors: Gabriella PATAKY, Maho SATO, Jonathan SILVERMAN

Graphic Designer: Viola REKVÉNYI

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Front and back cover image: ©Wanfei HUANG



Invitation to Use Your Imagination

Keywords or phrases: Imagination, photographs, scenes from Cuba



Seija ULKUNIEMI

Seija Ulkuniemi is a Doctor of Arts (Art & Design), Master of Education, and a photographer. Since 1997, she has worked as a senior university lecturer in visual art education at primary education teacher training at the University of Lapland. She has participated in numerous national and international art exhibitions.
seija.ulkuniemi@tulapland.fi

Visual art teachers search for ways to help their students see the world with open hearts and minds, study what they see and be open to a multitude of interpretations. Through this series of abstract photos from Cuba, I invite you to use your imagination as you interpret each image and share your readings. My own interpretations, as along with those of some viewers, are also partly discussed, and can be found via the link included.

Look, interpret, and replace "Untitled" with your reading.

Take a moment: breathe deeply and let your imagination discover the meaning of the following images. If you want to share any of your interpretations, please follow this link and add your text after the existing titles.

https://lucit-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/sulkunie_ulapland_fi/Eczw5ZNuovhMrL64hICeelwBD3_Tb27lovXFK8bqorPujw?e=ti6YTA

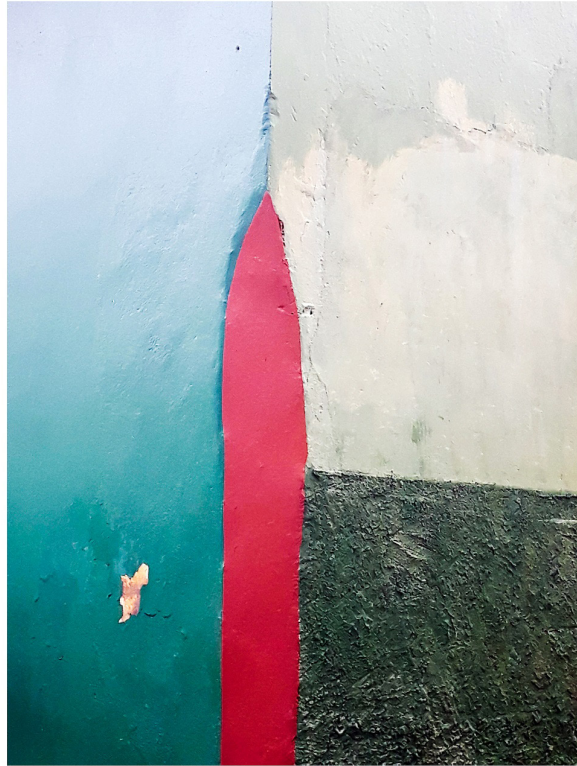


1. Author: *Untitled*



2. Author: *Untitled*

Seija ULKUNIEMI - Invitation to Use Your Imagination



3. Author: *Untitled*



4. Author: *Untitled*



5. Author: *Untitled*

6. Author: *Untitled*7. Author: *Untitled*8. Author: *Untitled*

— Homage to (Cuban) house painters whose works tell (hi)stories

In 2017 I visited Trinidad, one of the oldest cities in Cuba. As I wandered the streets, I was transfixed by the beautiful colours of the walls. In Trinidad, when the surface of a wall is damaged, it is fixed, plastered and painted in whatever colours are available. The various layers of colours and textures, seen through cracks and chips in the paint, change over time. Sometimes you can see traces of multiple decades, even on tiny wall areas. I took photographs of these “miniature paintings,” which tell stories of the past.

In 2020, I selected some of these photos for an exhibition called *Histories of Painting*, referring to both the layers of paint and the various told and untold histories of visual art. The exhibition was an homage to the house painters who are

generally left anonymous but whose work affects much of our daily surroundings.

For over two decades, I’ve encouraged viewers of my photo exhibitions to participate in the process of meaning-making. The data of my doctoral dissertation consisted of their opinions and comments about the images (Ulkuuniemi, 2007).

This exhibition was first shown at the Oulunsalo library gallery as part of the Oulunsalo Music Festival, where I was the invited artist of the year. As I have here, I offered each viewer a list of the works, all of which were “Untitled,” and asked them to record their title suggestions for any piece in the guest book. They could read my personal interpretations, which you will also find in this essay, on the back of the list.

–
Photographer's interpretive look and some quotations from the viewers' texts

To demonstrate the power of participatory imagination, I offer you example of viewers' title suggestion for these eight photos. I have included my own suggestions in *italics*, and some additional remarks.

Most of the photos have a figure-like area due to the cropping decisions I made when taking and editing the photos. These figures represented various characters in viewers' eyes.



Where I saw *A man resting on his blue fruit bed*, others found animals, such as "Ms. Mouse hurrying from the fruit shopping market to her home cavity" or "a squirrel".



A big-headed child rests relaxed on a rock next to a slender birches was seen being a person "at the dentist". The backwards leaning position is indeed like a patient's position.



The most congruent interpretations were made of *The first kiss of a match girl*. All the given titles were associated with love: "Touch of hearts" and "Oh! And they found each other."



I titled this photo *A wounded horse that escaped from Picasso's Guernica painting*, referring to the famous painting artist. The cracked surface gives the impression of movement: one viewer saw it "Santa Claus and the summer rush", whereas another named it "a thick bullfighter chasing a thin bull".



The title "...Picasso was (also) here!", offered for the photo I titled *A mother protects her baby in her arms, as though humbly kneeling for prayer*, represents intertextual reading. Somebody associated the figure with Picasso's drawing style with a reference to the saying, "Kilroy was here".



One viewer had philosophical artistic thoughts about *A red tower rises, knife-sharp without questioning justification for its existence*: (s)he saw it as "the messenger of avant-garde" with an addition that "it is never self-evident how the future will define it".



After reading the viewer's title suggestion, "Särestöniemi's dream" for the piece I called *I think I can see an angel that appears to the birds huddling in the shade of a tree*, I realised that the texture is, indeed, reminiscent of the [special painting technique] used by Finnish expressionist painter Reidar Särestöniemi.



Traces of love in flight was titled by someone honouring the famous Finnish ski jumper "Fly, Matti Nykänen". I find this a hilarious example of flight of imagination.

Concluding remarks

My series shows that originally abstract walls can become figurative simply with certain photo cropping. People also tend to look for representational forms that help them make meaning, especially if they are encouraged to do so. I hope that you as a viewer will continue looking at the surroundings with the playful and interpretive attitude I offer you. I am also planning to show this photo series to my students and invite you to do the same.

My experience in Cuba made me pay more attention to the fact that the buildings in my area lack both colours and cracks of paint layers. Here, the "histories of painting" are hidden, harder to find. But let us try!

As photographer, I am happy that viewers in Oulunsalo were engaged, taking the time and effort to write about their exhibition experience in the guest book. Personal reflections give new insights to those who read them. I have already started to view my photos with new eyes: e.g., when I look at the image 2, nowadays I always first see a squirrel instead of a resting man, and now I associate the image 6 with a situation at the dentist where I am often rather nervous than relaxed.

Viewers' participation has encouraged me to continue playing with my collection of Cuban wall photos. There will soon be a *Histories of Painting Part II* again open to interpretation and interaction through inventing titles.

Finally, if you have stopped to take a second look at any of the photos and given it a new title, my goal for this visual essay has almost been reached. If this experiment has made you smile, the aim was fulfilled.

References

Ulkuniemi, S. (2007). Exposed lives: Dialogues between viewers and installations about family photography. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 3(1), 43–55.



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