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Korolainen, Hanna-Kaisa

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Published in:
Research in Arts and Education

Published: 01/01/2021

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please cite the original version:
Korolainen, H-K. (2021). Warhol and me – battle of the authors: from copying to sharing. *Research in Arts and Education*, 2021(1), 50-71.
<https://wiki.aalto.fi/download/attachments/191500264/Korolainen.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1621264459442&api=v2>

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Warhol and me – battle of the authors: from copying to sharing

Hanna-Kaisa Korolainen

Aalto University, Finland

hanna-kaisa.korolainen@aalto.fi

Biography

Hanna–Kaisa Korolainen (1976) is artist, teacher and researcher, who is interested in the sources of inspiration and art history. She reflects these in her practice, which includes textiles, ceramics and glass. Korolainen’s works have been presented both in her natal Finland and abroad. Her recent exhibitions include EMMA Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Design Museum of Helsinki and Hvitträsk, a historical Art Nouveau site near Helsinki. Korolainen is currently a doctoral candidate at the Department of Design, Aalto University.

Abstract

This paper presents two case studies which tackle issues of authorship and sources of inspiration. To what extent can the sources of inspiration be used as a part of the creative process before there is a risk of copying? To enable an understanding of what defines an authentic work of art and how we all become authors, this paper looks into specific concepts, such as Walter Benjamin’s ‘aura’, David Joselit’s concept of ‘buzz’, and postmodernism, the time when reproduction became an accepted form of art. These themes are investigated in greater detail by analysing two related artistic case studies that were

inspired by American artist Andy Warhol, the undeniable master of the art of copying. Case studies follow Warhol's example by using repetition and borrowing images made by others as the basis of the creative process. The paper proposes that to be able to find answers the border between inspiration and copying needs to be crossed and the experience of copying lived in order to cultivate a deeper understanding of the topic. Sources of inspiration become an important part of the process and the traditional concept of single authorship might need to be replaced by 'shared authorship'.

Keywords

Authorship, Sharing, Copying, Sources of inspiration, Shared authorship

Introduction

The designers and artists of today are well aware of copyright and authorship issues. At the same time, it has become rather common to use creative content produced by others as the basis of an artwork or design. Since the development of digital techniques, it seems that copying has almost become an acceptable form of producing new designs or works of art. The term 'copying' means that something (a visual, sound or other content) is taken as it is to serve in creation of new content. Nevertheless, copying should not be considered to be something solely negative. Copying is a historical, constant and current phenomenon that has been practised as a medium of learning and developing new skills as well as for criminal purposes (Charpigny et al., 2010; Beylot, 2004).

In our present digital era, where visual information is easily available, the cycle of copying has become faster than ever. An idea can be copy-pasted with a few clicks. Consumers have

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long accepted the fact that they are wearing, watching and using things that are far from original. For example, the industry of fast fashion is mostly based on copying due to the pressure of producing new collections at an ever-growing speed and for a bigger profit (Korolainen, 2016). Thus, at the centre of my study lies the practitioner, who accomplishes the act of copying. Possibly, during our era of constant sharing, the entire idea of owning an idea is becoming old-fashioned. Can an idea (contributed to one single creator) be so unique and unrelated to others that it is worth protecting for life and beyond?

Copyright laws exist to enable designers and artists become recognized for their own work—basically to guide the income generated from it to the right person. In many countries, for example in my native Finland, copyright law does not specify clearly what is to be considered copying and what is not. The law states that if the practitioner by “freely changing somebody else’s artwork has created a new and original piece of art, the copyright is no longer dependent upon the initial artwork” (Larros, 2014—translated by author). A violation of the copyright cannot be judged by merely looking at or listening to a work of art (Larros, 2014). Many artworks and designs resemble each other, especially if they were made during the same era and within the same cultural frame. Cultural historian Egon Friedell (1932) notes that images produced during any period unavoidably reflect the cultural history and image-filled everyday world. In my experience, it is hard to create something original and detached from the surrounding world. As the sculptor Henry Moore pointed out, a person who wants to become a writer, has no option but to read (Moore & Hedgecoe, 1999). Accordingly, an artist must encounter diverse artworks and be aware of art history. Just as a writer does not need to invent a new alphabet, how could an artist start from nowhere?

This paper suggests that the borders between inspiration and copying need to be crossed, as only through lived experience can the practitioner gain a deeper understanding of the matter. This paper presents two creative case studies that question the role of authorship in the creative

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processes. American artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987), who made the concept of copying a form of art (Figure 1), acts as the main source of inspiration in both cases (Appignanesi et al., 1998).

Next, this paper will present a discussion around the themes of authorship and authenticity, before presenting Warhol and his art in more detail. Then, two related case studies that try to elucidate the relationship between the creative process, sources of inspiration and (shared) authorship will be explained.



Figure 1. Andy Warhol: Ten Lizes (1963), Centre Pompidou. Photo by author, 2018.

How did we all become authors?

An artwork needs to be claimed as authentic before it can be copied. By who and when was it created, and who can therefore be declared as the author? Authenticity is linked to authorship.

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Sociologist of the arts Nathalie Heinich (1996a) stresses that ‘Artists’, who are original enough, become the proof of authenticity and origin for their works. Without the certitude of the author, an artwork loses most of its financial value.

Visual artists have not always been celebrated as authors. It could be related to the previous roles of images, often functional or religious (Heinich, 1996a). They were necessities of daily life, and for that reason not considered as proofs of an individual artistic genius. Earlier, disciplines such as painting or sculpture were not regarded as art, and their makers were consequently anonymous (Heinich, 1996b). They became recognized when nobles began consuming art as leisure and art academies were established, which happened in Italy in the middle of 16th century and in France in the 17th.

Today, anyone can be an author, and this authorship can be rather easily indicated. Since the middle of the 18th century, the signature became the common way of signalling the identity of the author (Heinich, 1996b). Artworks began to be signed so that their makers could gain recognition thus ultimately raise the prices. There are ancient examples of ceramics signed in the 6th century B.C. by potters and vase painters, which proved that they were proud of their achievements and could become famous for their personal style (Janson & Janson, 2003; Kris & Kurtz, 1979). Signing the works emphasized the fact that the artist was also an individual, a particular person (Heinich, 1996a). Warhol himself did not sign his works between 1962 and 1982, which was the most productive and famous period of his artistic career (Matthieussent, 1994). However, a signature was not the only feature that proved authenticity; an artist had to develop an individual and easily recognizable style (Heinich, 1996a; 1996b).

The French philosophers Roland Barthes (1967) and Michel Foucault (1969) questioned the role of the author in the field of literature. Their main point was the shift of importance from the writer to the reader, as there are different ways to interpret written texts. Foucault asked whether everything that an author created could be part of his oeuvre. Would “a laundry bill” or

“a reminder of an appointment” (Foucault 1969, pp. 118-119) be included among an author’s works ? Since creating the *Campbell’s Soup Cans* series, Warhol sought to fade out the concept of the author: ‘let the machine replace the man, he claimed’ (Matthieussent, 1994).

What makes an artwork be considered authentic?

From a historical point of view, copying has not always been seen as something negative; for example, it was recognized as a way of learning new skills (Beylot, 2004; Heinich, 1996b). Painters, for example royal portraitists of the 17th century used to engage several copyists in their ateliers. It was only during the 18th century that the word ‘plagiat’ appeared in France along with the increase in the use of artists’ signatures. These transitions gave birth to the idea of the ‘original’ (Beylot, 2004; Heinich, 1996b). At the time, the term ‘plagiat’ meant copying which was done for profit (Charpigny, Gril-Mariotte and Privat-Chavigny, 2010).

Walter Benjamin (1969) noted that one cannot be sure of the authenticity of an artwork if the artwork in question is not present. He considered that an authentic work of art had some kind of abstract aura that surrounded it and made it unique and special. When the spectator experienced this kind of artwork, it felt almost like slowly entering inside it, for example being able to imagine walking inside a landscape painting (Benjamin, 1969). In contrast, mass-produced art was quickly devoured by the public. According to Benjamin, when an artwork was reproduced, it lost its authenticity and aura. Warhol represented an absolute contradiction to Benjamin’s theories, which nonetheless did not prevent Warhol gaining fame and financial profit (Matthieussent, 1994).

Also in contrast to Benjamin’s ideas, Heinich (1993) suggests that reproductions (such as postcards, copies, miniatures, internet images and so on) made of the original artworks increase the recognition of the artists. Not everyone can visit museums all around the world to experience the actual artworks, but this does not prevent artists from infatuating new audiences. American

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philosopher David Joselit (2013) presents a contemporary take on Benjamin's aura, which he calls 'buzz'. Buzz is created by being omnipresent everywhere at the same time; filling the internet with numerous 'hits', being present in museums, galleries, festivals, television and so on. But how was this buzz created before the internet and digital worldwide connections? Joselit points out the saturation strategy, that began in the art world during the 1960s when artists were no longer creating single artefacts but populations of images. Warhol was a pioneer with his 'factory'-produced silkscreen series and media appearances. He was everywhere: he made films, music, advertising and performances. He constructed his own public image and his works were strongly associated with his personality. Warhol described himself as a "business artist" whose work was more to create "product lines" than individual artefacts (Joselit, 2013, pp. 16–19). Without doubt, Warhol had created his own colossal aura (Matthieussent, 1994).

Warhol and the art of reproduction

Warhol was the unchallenged master in the art of copying, and he often used photographs taken by others in his silk-screened artworks (Danto, 2011; Vanel et al., 2016; Matthieussent, 1994). Warhol identified himself with a machine, which was also proven by the lack of signature in most of his artworks. Inside Warhol's studio, which he called 'The Factory', a lot of works were produced collaboratively. This might explain why the signature was omitted and the idea of an original rejected. Inexplicably, given this machine-like-attitude, Warhol could not help but add fervent brushstrokes on top of his serigraphs. He wanted to be a machine but could not entirely abandon the idea of the painting artist whose personal touches made each artwork unique (Bulteau, 2009).

Warhol did not always make reproductions. He studied art in his youth and specialized mostly in commercial art (Bourdon, 1989). He worked for over ten years as an illustrator for magazines and became famous for his drawing and painting style. Unexpectedly, he changed

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his ways of working and started to copy-paint comics and advertisements into a bigger format (Bourdon, 1989). His subjects became ordinary, referring to the mass culture iconography. Enlarged into 2 metre-high paintings these every-day-objects seemed mad and out of place. To be able to make his enlarged reproductions of comics or images cut from magazines, Warhol used an episcopo, a projector for opaque images. He would project the image on the wall and copy the outlines on the paper. The motivation for Warhol to reproduce such images is unknown. Critics have tried in vain to find irony. It almost seemed as if Warhol was sharing his fascination for these images presenting superheroes and other similar characters. Once the comics were enlarged and painted on canvas their impression changed: the ordinary transformed into the extraordinary. At the time, comics were mostly regarded as part of the 9th art, the less valued amidst all the artforms. Painting, on the other hand, was positioned as one of the most appreciated. Warhol elevated popular art into gallery-appropriate form. He used the same method of copying-tracing while making advertisements. The advertisements that he reproduced in such a manner became more precious as paintings and gained enduring aesthetics.

It is curious how Warhol managed to create such a recognizable style by copying, creating an illusion of endless repetition and referencing the commercial world. Until the 1960s, the art world had remained hostile towards mass culture. This changed when Warhol and his fellow artists presented the principles of pop art and Warhol became famous with his *Brillo* boxes and *Campbell* soup labels (Danto, 2011). Warhol was influenced by his contemporaries, such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who dealt with similar themes (Bourdon, 1989; Danto, 2009). He was fascinated by the popular, those subjects that revealed everyday life and seemed to be nothing special (Danto, 2011). Subjects that Warhol selected for his reproductions were things that any American had access to, from *Coca-Cola* to canned peaches (Bourdon, 1989). Naturally, certain critics of his time judged his subjects as too common and not fit to enter the scene of fine arts. They criticised the commercials as something poisonous belonging to

the vulgar world of selling strategies. Warhol went as far as presenting these ad-paintings in the window display of a department store behind the mannequins presenting the fashion of the season. He must have enjoyed seeing his paintings admired by the customers. Warhol stated that the act of buying was much more American than thinking.

Battle of the authors – two cases of copying

After contemplating copying and inspiration through Warhol's lenses, I move now on to my own creative practice. Warhol stayed present and acted as my mirror when I surveyed my own textile and glass design processes. As a practitioner my first passion was photography, but later I moved on to textile art and design. Copying and repetition are omnipresent in all these fields.

In the following two case studies, I challenge the border between copying and inspiration. Most of the time I employ digital devices such as computer programs, a CNC machine or moulds to enable the process of copying, as copying by hand is not literally speaking copying as every hand creates a slightly different result (Beylot, 2004; Gerez & Mallet, 2016).

Copying Andy Warhol

For the first case study, I decided to copy one of Warhol's artworks. I chose the *Flowers* series that he started working on in 1964 and continued with for many years (Vanel et al., 2016). Art historian Martha Buskirk (2003) notes that the original image used in the artwork was taken by photographer Patricia Caulfield, who was not pleased when she discovered in 1965 that Warhol had stolen her photograph of hibiscus flowers (Buskirk, 2003). Caulfield took legal action against Warhol, but the case was settled out of court. Warhol made many changes to the original photograph to make it more graphic by changing the contrast and the colours of the image, he cropped it and changed the sizes of some of the elements. However, the ultimate shapes were similar, and Caulfield recognized her image in Warhol's silkscreen

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painting displayed in the window of a book store. *Flowers* was not the only time that Warhol got into the trouble for using other people's images. This happened so many times during his early career that later he started to buy the copyright of the images, photograph them himself or ask his assistants to take them. One juicy rumour says that the Andy Warhol Foundation has taken out insurance to prepare against future copyright lawsuits. Still, knowing all this seems irrelevant, as copying images is so central to Warhol's art. I am not the first and probably not the last artist to take over *Flowers*; Elaine Sturtevant famously produced her versions already in 1965, they were very similar to Warhol's, as Warhol even lent Sturtevant his original screen.

At the beginning of my creative process, I copy-pasted one of Warhol's *Flowers* versions from the Internet and developed it further into a rug model with the help of the computer. I reduced the colours of the image and therefore I almost went backwards trying to imitate the way Warhol had made the graphic silkscreen image from the original photograph, by simplification. When transferring the image onto a rug, I wanted to repeat the model in different scales and with different colour combinations. To be able to attain more similarities with Warhol, I needed to 1) use repetition, 2) change scales and 3) vary the colours. Unfortunately, hand-tufting rugs is a very slow and costly exercise as lots of material is consumed. I started with fewer options, but with only three variations I achieved the correct impression: people could clearly recognize Warhol's presence. After the rug models had been prepared on computer and printed out in real size, they had to be transferred onto rug base fabric. I had greatly simplified the original image, but soon it became clear that having an almost 2-metre-wide, photograph-like-image to transfer onto fabric using a light table is a time consuming and challenging task (Figure 2).

In the end, I tufted one large rug (180cm x 180cm) and two smaller ones (70cm x 90cm) (Figure 3). I used my signature open-brushed mohair and Japanese velvet-like silk chenille yarns. For the colours, I was influenced firstly by those Warhol had used and secondly by the available materials. As has happened so many times before, initially I was glued to my source



Figure 2. Copying Warhol's *Flowers* onto rug base fabric. Photo by author, 2018.

of inspiration (Warhol and his art of copying) and later as the process advanced, I slowly floated further from original source and closer to my own artistic expression.

Unlike textile designers in general, I produce rugs by myself. This was the first time that I had not used own my original idea as the basis. In old times, when various hand-woven and knotted textiles were commonly produced, it took a couple of days for a professional painter to realize a model that a skilful artisan then would need up to several months or even years to accomplish, yet the artisan received much less money than the artist who designed the original

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model (Smith, 1997). For the realisation of the rug, I used a mechanical hand-tufting device, which even if it is faster than hand-knotting technique, still requires a considerable amount of work. I did not count my time, money, patience or physical labour. After some time, I got tired of following the traced model exactly and started to improvise with details. Slowly, I found ways of incorporating more and more of my own personal touches in the process. If I had spent my days of copying Warhol slavishly, I would have quickly lost all interest in my work.



Figure 3. When I repeated *Flowers* in several colour combinations and various scales, the resemblance to Warhol became more recognizable. Photo by author, 2018.

Copying myself and creating my own ‘Factory’

In the next stage of my copying exercises I became a little perplexed. How could I possibly go further than copying from the master (Warhol) directly? Hence, I chose a different approach; I played the role of a product designer and copied myself. Repetition was one of the central features in Warhol’s work: when the nature of each unique artwork was lost in the crowd, they started to resemble mass produced goods (Matthieussent, 1994).

For the first time in my life I made my acquaintance with the world of glass design. I was captivated by the shiny, polished surface that seemed to evoke plastic and machines. In addition, glass gave the opportunity to play with Warhol–inspired bright colours.

I designed a collection of mould-blown glass that I called *Saaristo64 [Archipelago64]*, inspired by Warhol’s serigraphy series *Death and Disasters* (1964). I selected this series because there the use of borrowed images was well argued; Warhol wanted to denounce the violence of his home country and the way it was banalized in daily news (Honnef, 1991). After defining my source of inspiration, I started to sketch the shapes and scales along with planning possible colour schemas. Sketching the ideas for the 3-dimensional shapes by hand felt quite liberating and I used a lot of my own imagination trying to figure what the final piece would look and feel like. During these brief moments I exercised not copying but dreaming.

When I started my glass project, I did not know that I would end up working with a whole factory of people. Naturally, as a beginner I needed more support than someone with more experience. Altogether, there were 12 people involved in the process in one way or another. While working in the university glass studio, teachers, studio masters, teaching assistants and fellow students gave advice and a helping hand. It took me several weeks just to find fresh alder for the glass moulds; finally, I got lucky as the nearby town’s green space department agreed to give me some. Their lumberjack cut the wood for me, which was then followed by all kinds of help with the making of the moulds, such as carrying those heavy logs and creating the 3D-

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rhino models with the computer. Collaboration became the keyword, the whole idea of singular authorship, rooted in the traditional world of design, started to seem more and more fuzzy.

At every stage, I needed guidance from somebody. I ended up by learning a multitude of things along the way by asking questions, watching YouTube tutorials, or simply practising; like drilling hundreds of holes with a 25cm drill bit into the wet wooden moulds or melting coloured glass rods at 1200 °C. In the final stages, I worked with a glassblower, Joonas Laakso, who realized my works. I was assisting him in the process, but even as an assistant, my skills were lacking. Still, it felt vital to connect with the most crucial part of the process somehow. Maybe I was desperately holding onto my last bit of authorship?

After the glass pieces were annealed, they needed to be finished with what are termed ‘cold-work’ methods. I was assisted with using the diamond saw that is used for cutting the glass. Luckily, after that I was able to make the other finishing touches by myself. The collaborative aspect of this project was simultaneously rewarding and challenging. Hence, I was happy to be able to make something alone. As the glass was cold, I was therefore able to touch it with bare hands. Hot glass is too hot to be touched without tools and this lack of handprints also affirms the impression of a machine-made material that almost seems unapproachable.

So, what do I mean by saying ‘copying myself’? Well, first of all, I designed and partly realized (with all that help) the wooden turn-around-moulds (Figure 4) that enabled me to produce the glass pieces in series. These round glass models were simply designed with the help of a drawing, or actually just a half of a drawing – only half of the object’s outline was needed. Then this little line was transferred into a digital shape and copied infinitely in a round 3D-model with the help of the computer.

When I look at the ready glass pieces, I am constantly reminded of the moment when I saw them coming out of the mould, still blazing. Certainly, they were all presenting various colours, but overall the forms looked similar (Figure 5). I had 5 different moulds for the shapes, but they



Figure 4. Wooden moulds were cut from a fresh alder that Espoo city kindly gave me. Photo by author, 2018.

all shared the same shape language; I had even copy-pasted details of the angles from one to another. When the shapes were repeated like this, they ended up losing their uniqueness. The first, and therefore original, had ceased to exist; it was impossible to recognize which one it was. Nevertheless, each had tiny differences, just as in Warhol's silkscreen paintings where he had added brushstrokes or simply used different pressure or quantity of ink. Even with these small changes in the details, the glass pieces gave a strong impression of similarity. Repetition ampli-



Figure 5. Series of glass pieces before cold-working process, even if the shapes and colours vary, they form an easily recognizable entirety. Photo by author, 2018.

fied the impact. I got a sensation that each similar shape replaced the previous one, creating an illusion of senseless endless repetition. A unique work of art is rare and therefore appreciated, but when repeated it starts to feel less precious. Everything became ordinary, like soup cans on a factory line. Warhol did say that he wanted to create “ordinary-ordinary”(Bulteau, 2009, pp. 52-53) when he chose to employ subjects from everyday life. My reproduced glass goods had become ordinary and lost their uniqueness and authenticity; they became products.

From copying to sharing

The aim of these case studies was to understand fully what can be considered as inspiration and what copying. After several months of practice and reflection, I gained the feeling that I stood on solid ground when it comes to using sources of inspiration as part of my process. When I became more aware of my sources of inspiration, I also learned more of my own creative process. There was not only collaboration with a famous artist from the past but also many active participants of my own time. I understood that all the creative process is a fruit of collaborative practices in some extent.

When evaluating my process, I asked myself, which one of us, Warhol or me, had more impact in my artworks, and could that even be evaluated? In my artistic exercises, I used copying and repeating techniques, features that Benjamin (1936) declared would affect the authenticity of the artworks. Are my pieces lacking the aura, the Benjaminian quasi-magical air that surrounds iconic artworks? My works of art could be considered mere pastiches of originals, or results of collaborations without singular authorship.

When I used the method of copying in my artistic practice, I was not entirely sure that I was doing the right thing. Copying in a negative sense is always more or less related to profit. The most important feature when determining if something has been done for profit, is to detect whether the original source is openly cited or not. When it is hidden, it seems evident that the act of copying is done for criminal purposes and it can be considered as an act of stealing. Here, I speak openly about my processes and keep a working diary (Figure 6). Careful documentation of the process can prove which artwork was created first and even more importantly what kind of procedures preceded the final design. Openness is the keyword: for example French fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent used many famous artworks in his creations; he would then identify them as a homage to or an inspiration of this or that artist (Chenoune & Muller, 2010).

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Figure 6. Various phases of the copying processes were carefully noted down. Diary notes are a way to prove that the practitioner has created her works herself. In this particular case it became a proof of copying. Photo by author, 2018.

Copying in a positive sense can be seen as creating a discussion, an encounter between the artist and the source (Gerez & Mallet, 2016). My encounter with Warhol was, despite the theme of 'copying', rather delightful. Warhol gave me not only visual inspiration but also ideas related to the essence of art and authorship. He managed to lay some of his gigantic aura upon my work,

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for example when I was working with *Flowers* (Figure 7), I received a lot of admiration. At the beginning, it felt vital to explain that this was not solely me or my work, but also Warhol's (and Caulfield's). As time went by, even if the original idea of *Flowers* did not belong to me, it started to feel also mine, like shared capital. I shifted from copying to sharing, and the old formula 'author → artwork' became 'author + sources of inspiration → artwork'. There was no longer a need to define who won the battle. I became proud of my own work but felt no need to hide my original sources; on the contrary, I was openly and unashamedly following Warhol, just like troops, people or animals follow their influential leaders (Tarde, 2015). And maybe one day, somebody will follow me.



Figure 7. Finished *Flowers* rug, hand-tufted mohair, 180cm x 180cm. Photo by Anne Kinnunen, 2020.

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