Now. After.

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Cover image: Armas Veriö, Tuonelanjoki-tapestry (1922)
Photo: Taija Veriö-Piispanen
Now. After.

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Preface

I consider myself as a young person. I lack terminal diseases and self-destructive habits. Of course I could exercise more, eat healthier and drink less, but so could most people - and they aren’t that bothered about mortality.

It would seem that there is no apparent reason to be concerned with dying yet. At the same time death is something that is ever present in various ways that now all seem to come together under the same headline: I consume contributing to the misery of others, I cannot live forever through my offspring, I imitate my grandfather by creating a Memento Mori for myself.

All things that live will also eventually die. So it could be said that death is unavoidable in two ways: as an eventuality and as a subject of art. Needless to say, this is only the first step on a long journey.
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1 INTRODUCTION

For most of us in a mainly Lutheran country it is very unlikely we’ll ever see a dead person. If not faced with an unexpected event, like an accident, closest to the real thing we are ever likely to come across are the images conveyed by the media. In the news the medium distances us even further and everything is often served with a complementary commentary. There the narrative always seems to include interviews of random people who in most cases had absolutely nothing to do with the event in question. The role of media doesn’t really seem to bring us any real insight on the matter, but often only offers us a model on how to react, how to grieve and to be bewildered by the fact that life actually can end. By this point we are either reassured that death is something that happens to someone else somewhere else or we become otherwise unwilling to tease ourselves any further. The aftermath is more likely to cause a change in the channel instead of our attitudes towards life and its limitations.

Avoiding discomfort is something we are very good at. Mortality is no exception. We seem to be very clever in finding various ways of distracting ourselves from it - and we are actually quite happy in doing so. For it has become an unquestionable value in
itself that life will continue as long as possible. This hasn’t gone unnoticed by the industry either. It seems as if youth could be bought in several forms. Perhaps the fear of being old - and eventually dead and decaying - is a good incentive to buy things like juice with added vitamins, revitalizing shower gels and trendy sneakers. The people in adverts are generally young, attractive, vital and healthy, not dead and decaying. The only dead people appearing in commercials, popular TV shows and movies are the romantic types, vampires and such like. But if we think about it, that actually makes sense since vampires tend to live forever after their initial death, which is usually depicted to be more akin to copulation than to a car accident. The other popularized type is the zombie. In that case crossing the final border turns you into something threatening, even to the ones you care about. Although the fantasies occupy the opposite ends of a spectrum, in both cases you become something destructive that abandons the normal sphere of existence: in one you are elevated into immortality with superhero-like powers and in the other downgraded into something completely uncontrollable and repulsive.

Fantasy aside, death is a completely natural event, an inevitable result from being born. Even though I suppose we all can agree on the previous, apart from entertainment death doesn’t seem to be visible in our culture. For example we don’t have celebrations
like el Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, celebrated in Mexico and similar celebrations in many other parts of the world.

But if we lack big and visible celebratory events, what do we have, what is our death culture like? Has it really changed, and have we actually ever been more at ease with death than we are now?

At least it can be claimed that death was more within the realm of normal. Birth, as well as death took place in our close vicinity, usually in our homes. Perhaps our ancestors, the Fenno-Ugric nomads, were so accustomed to death as part of everyday life that it was an inseparable part of their existence. And even more recently, the generation of our grandparents who fought in the war, definitely had a closer relation with mortality. If such a relation did exist in the recent past it is apparent that my generation hasn’t inherited it.

Reasons for this can partly be found in the development of urban culture. Not being responsible for supplying or producing our own food naturally leads us deeper into a society of specialists where each individual has many roles and responsibilities of smaller and smaller details - which in turn makes us consumers in every other aspect. And on subjects that rest on the shoulders of others we seem to know - and want to know - less and less about.
Consequences of a limited lifespan are dealt by professionals as a service we consume - and we are utterly unaware of the particulars of it.

But before taking the dive into the deep end of a changing death culture, a question might be asked about my relationship with death, apart from me being a living part in this culture.
Personal connections

For someone in the age of thirty-two, which I consider still to be young, a question might be raised concerning the reasons for willingly studying - and even preparing for one’s own death.

First of all I cannot predict the future, or possess any knowledge about my end nor are there any obvious omens of it. I lack terminal diseases, hazardous occupations, dangerous hobbies and I don’t have too many unhealthy habits either. There isn’t a need to worry about self-destructiveness either, although Finland has been many times referred as one of the suicide capitals of the world. We should have lost this questionable first place title a while ago, since the amount of suicides in Finland in 2010 was the lowest in 40 years, and it has decreased by 40% within the past fifteen years.\(^1\) Also in Europe between 2000 and 2012 Finland has been second to Latvia, Lithuania and Hungary in deaths due to suicide.\(^2\)

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2. Death rate of a population adjusted to standard age distribution.
But is there then something else that should or could be expected? What do we statistically die of? A common cause of death in Finland in 2010 for men between 16 and 64 years of age was still coronary heart disease.\(^3\) It was second only to alcohol-related deaths. For women in the same age group the most common cause of death was breast cancer. Alcohol related deaths were the second most common cause of death and coronary heart disease the fifth.\(^4\) Cardiovascular diseases were the most common cause of death for both sexes in the age of 65 and over.\(^5\)

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Biologically the life span of our species is around 120 years and within the last years no development in the field of medicine has added a single day to it.\textsuperscript{6} Still, our average life expectancy is longer than ever before. Because of this it is very likely that we shall die a lot older and a lot sicker than ever before. In the light of statistics if we are to die younger than 65 it will most likely be self-induced either through alcohol or diseases that mostly stem from our lifestyle.

So statistically speaking, even if I were to start drinking and smoking heavily as well as going on a diet of fatty foods I should have at least thirty years before me. It would seem that there is no foreseeable reason to be concerned with dying yet.

Instead of being something topical the personal connections are to be found elsewhere. I have recently been tested and diagnosed to be unable to have biological children. It could be

\textsuperscript{6} Martti Kekomäki, "Kuolema Suomessa: Terveystaloustieteen näkökulmia ihmisen kuolevaisuuteen" (lecture, Helsingin Yliopiston tutkijakollegium, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, April 8, 2013).

The lectures can be found also on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfu1zn2qpQc
said that the results were surprising especially since there hasn’t been any warning signs within the family. After a battery of tests, including semen, blood and biopsies, there seemed to be no apparent explanation for this either. No apparent reasons in biology, no visible fault in the genes - with the exception that mine were set to end here.

When planning for the future, more specifically, having children, this discovery has now led me to the opposite direction: learning more about my relatives, particularly the ones whom I knew next to nothing about. I started to find out more about my grandfather. In a sense I started to climb down the family tree instead of going up.

I had always considered my grandfather Armas Veriö to be first and foremost a painter. And since he passed away before I was born, I have never actually met him. Still he has in a way always been present in the form of his works. The house of my parents is a sort of a museum consisting of the paintings, sculptures and ceramics made by one family: me, my mother, my grandmother as well as my grandfather.

As a child I remember being afraid of one self-portrait of Armas that was hanging on the wall of the study. In it he had an expression of a person who was determined to accomplish;
staring at the spectator gripping his pipe in a precarious grin that seemed to punctuate that he knew he was seen and was not to be taken lightly. This can be due to him focusing on the act of painting - but nevertheless he apparently wanted to convey precisely that image.

Only now I have started to discover that he was a lot more than a painter - or, a painting on the wall. He has roots in Lapland. But he definitely didn’t seem to want to stay rooted in one spot. He lived and worked for a while in America. And in Paris. And in Turku, just to mention a few.

As a man of many traits he managed to get involved in many business ventures. He ran a bookstore in Hyvinkää in Southern Finland. In addition to that he was the co-owner of Graniitti, a company that designed and manufactured headstones.

Although the gravestones haven’t been manufactured there for decades the company still exists in a way in Hyvinkää. It was sold in the 60s and now continues under a new name as the funeral home Hyvinkään Hautaustoimisto.⁷

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⁷ The information is based on the diaries and letters of Armas as well as discussions with my mother Taija Veriö-Piispanen. Armas was in active correspondence with my grandmother and most of the letters are still preserved in my mothers’ collections together with drawn and written diaries.
Granitista oivan hän artikkelin osti,
tyhjästä liinuksenkin pystyhyn nosti.
Mainosti "ulkoa" työta ja rahaa.
Koneet sahas niin muodot granititjän.

Illustration 1 - A page from Armas's diary
When Armas was still working there he also designed the headstone for the Veriö family grave. Made of black granite it was referred as *piironki*, “a chest of drawers” by my grandmother. The stone itself was big and L-shaped - apparently made to hold many names. The imagery carved on to the side of the stone consisted of stylized ivy, growing in front of three panels - the middle one depicting a cross - under the text *ecce homo*, behold the man.

The grave is located in the Puolimatka cemetery. The grave originally belonged to Lauri Veriö who sold it to Armas. Buried in the family grave are mothers’ cousin Ilmari Veriö, my great-grandmother Olga Vilhelmiina Veriö (nee Wallenius), my grandfathers’ first wife Martha Maria Veriö (nee Ullengren), grandfathers’ sister Hellä Olga Veriö, my grandmother Rauha Eine Orvokki Sipilä-Veriö and Armas Julius Veriö himself.

Basically Armas had made his own headstone for the grave where he was eventually buried. Whether he knew - or was even interested in - statistics or probabilities, he knew where he was going and started to address that while he was alive.
illustration 2 - Veriö family grave in Puolimatka cemetery
Aiming where

Identity is something I consider to be a constructivist one: first we come to existence and after that we start to construct our identity. Some blocks are definitely chosen while others are added more subconsciously. Instead of being a static construction, identity is under constant development. And since death is an ever-present subject, it also reflects who we are and how we want to be perceived.

Within the artworks, as well as the written part, I will focus on presentation of identity in connection with mortality. The objective is to take an active stance in understanding and shaping it and including the limitations of our existence as an essential part of it. In nearly everything we do we are in relation either with our own mortality or the mortality others, although this seems to be hidden as a topic that isn’t openly discussed. The identity in question in this case is my own, although the artworks will most likely rely on concepts that could be applicable in describing the way most of us behave. The artworks created within the process relate to different stages concerning identity in this relation: now, when facing a crisis and finally, after death.
Instead of trying to renew or to revolutionize the tradition, creating the artworks is a way of raising an issue that is mostly ignored. I see death as something that we have lost contact with - a theme that is as ancient and as ever present, as it is inherent. And as such, it would benefit our own well-being should it be given more thought, at minimum opened for discussion. To understand the nature of art to be one of multiple interpretations the goal is not in coming up with final answers that will end all discussion. The artworks can function as a catalyst for this. I see most public discussion as unpragmatic and superficial, especially if conducted in the anonymous forums of the Internet, which is why I aim to have personal conversations with people instead. Although not a method that would reach the masses I see it as a genuine way of dealing with taboos and getting towards an understanding. A discussion as a form is fitting since it doesn’t imply that I would be the sole authority on the matter, on the contrary, as an active event I can also learn from others during them.

With the process of making the artworks and the thesis related to it, another personal goal is to start learning *Ars Moriendi*, the Art of Dying, the ways how to die well. My hypothesis is that if we would not only accept but also consciously prepare for the inevitable it would make our lives better.
The written part of the thesis will also discuss death in the Finnish society and my personal connection to it. I will cover how the traditions have evolved as a way to provide perspective and also cover some of the current trends concerning preparations for the inevitable, focusing mostly on coffins as a feature representing the decedent. Although giving some examples on funeral traditions on a wider perspective, the focus is in Finland and evangelic-Lutheran aspect. Confining the subject is mandatory due to the simple vastness of it, the wide range of works made (inside the field of art as well as other disciplines) on the subject, and the fact that being Finnish as well as a member of the evangelic-Lutheran church gives me an - albeit perhaps an atypical - insiders view, instead of commenting funerals from the viewpoint of Islam, for example.

Finnish funeral customs have been surprisingly extensively written about from the viewpoint of religion and history. However they are mostly in Finnish and so far haven't been translated into English. This is one of the reasons why this thesis is written in English, this makes it available to a larger audience. The other practical reason lies within the nature of the studies in environmental art, the curriculum is an international one and as such English is a logical choice. All of the original phrases or other terminology contained are in italics. Any translations found
in the written part are made by the author, unless noted otherwise.

The thesis is divided into sections moving from general towards more personal. The cultural history part concerning funeral customs in (the area currently known as) Finland is in the chapter *Forming the distance*. The description of the artistic process is in the chapter *Methods* and the artworks stemming from the cultural and personal history is in the chapter *Pleating the distance*. 
2 FORMING THE DISTANCE

The way we concern ourselves with mortality has changed a lot over time. Religion as well as industrialization and geographical position have all had a major influence on the way we deal with the dead and the way we as a society relate to it. In general it could be said that our relation has gravitated from the needs and beliefs of a community towards those of an individual and as such there is a certain need for reinventing traditions. In many cases the old traditions - based on religion or not - no longer seem to serve our needs and have become more or less mandatory procedures that most people go through without giving it another thought.

The distance, by which I mean gradually ostracizing everything related to death, has taken place within a relatively short period and I claim it to be one of the biggest factors behind our feelings of helplessness when confronting it. Within any organized urban society the roles are specialized beyond agriculture but having more knowledge and understanding about other fields of specialty - especially of an inherent attribute that concerns everyone, such as mortality - is one of the keys in understanding ourselves.
To understand how the distance has taken form over time it is useful to look at the history before dwelling on the current. The history underlines some of the practices that still have an effect today, although often without offering the connection they once did.

Away from the living

For almost a millennia Finland has been the meeting point of eastern and western influences and starting from the Middle Ages Finland has been a combination of both eastern and western death culture. The customs have varied much even before that. Leena Aaltonen has written about the evolvement of the funeral customs in the current area of Finland. The area has had multiple stages of development after ice age in that perspective.

The earliest way for handling the dead was most likely hanging them on a tree or hiding them in caves. During Stone Age (800-1500 BC) the dead seemed to belong to the homesteads like the

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8 Kyösti Kiiskinen, Hautauskulttuuri Suomessa : Suomen hautaustoimistojen liiton 50-vuotisjuhlakirja (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 1992), 7-10.
living. The graves from that era were located in the hearts of dwellings, sometimes even in the base of huts. Actual funeral mounds or other structures above ground haven’t been found from that era. Also the remains of coffins or similar constructions are very rare so it was likely that the remains were most commonly wrapped in animal skins.

In the Bronze Age (1500-500 BC) funeral customs seem to have gradually changed. Instead of burying to the ground, *hiidenkiuas*, barrows consisting of stacked rocks were created. They were round or rectangular in shape ranging from ten to thirty meters in diameter. In the barrows the body was placed on the surface of the ground or cliff in a coffin made of stone slates.

During the Iron Age (500 BC - 1150 AC) some of the graves were rock barrows. In addition there were cemeteries where the bodies were first burned and the remains were then covered with a heap of rocks or a mound of mixed earth and rock. At the end of the 5th century the form changed more towards a field of stones and the remains of burned bodies were scattered between the stones.

In Finland in the Middle Ages the dead were still kept close to the living. First of all, it wasn’t uncommon for the body of a deceased to be kept at home before the burial. This was after all the most likely place for a person to die in the first place. Even the funeral
services held by the evangelic-Lutheran church included more than just the service held at the grave and a memorial. In addition prayers for the dead, and a wake, consecration of the body were held at home before a procession to transport the body to the church.

The service held at home wasn’t actually removed from the church’s manuals until 1557. In 1614 the ceremony was completely renewed to a form, which is quite similar to the one we have today. In practice this didn’t shed all the older customs entirely and it was common for people to uloslaulaa, which literally means to sing out, to accompany the decedent by singing during the journey when the coffin was carried out from the home, although it wasn’t anymore included in the official doctrine.⁹

**Burials within churches**

Like in most parts of Europe burying the dead within the churches was a common practice also in Finland. Until the 16th century burials inside the church were popular among all classes,

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although mostly preserved for the wealthier families due to the high cost. Excluding the dead from the church started partly out of practical reasons, foremost being contamination and diseases: "The house of the Lord became a place of decease and stench".\textsuperscript{10} This made sense, as there had to be a way for the living to gather in the church as well as commune with the dead without a risk of accidentally joining them.

After death became associated with the unclean, burials within churches also stopped. It was completely banned by the Finnish senate in 1822 and the bodies had to be buried outside the actual buildings. The church still remained as the maintainer of graves mostly due to religious reasons: the body still was a temple of the Holy Ghost and would be resurrected one day. The burial site was also an important place. People would gather at a person’s grave not only to pray but also to eat in the memory of the deceased. Interestingly similar customs of eating on the gravesite can be found in many areas in Finland as well as in kindred nations, for example in White Karelia,\textsuperscript{11} although the form and the meaning of the custom are in both cases quite different.

\textsuperscript{10} Pirjo Aaltonen ed., Hautaustoimen käsikirja (Helsinki: Edita Prima Oy, 2005) 43-44.

Before the burials in churches were banned in Europe they had taken on quite elaborate and creative solutions in the form of charnels, ossuaries and bone chapels.\textsuperscript{12} In them the human remains were part of the building instead of being hidden from view. If one is to compare the aesthetic of a cemetery today to the charnel houses of the past, the dead literally do seem to be literally hidden today. In charnels the dead had an actual physical presence in the form of bones and skulls.

This seems now something totally alien to us. If we were to visit a charnel site it would most likely be for the same reasons as visiting a freak show: a peculiar combination of attraction and repulsion, to ask questions like “what were they thinking”. For a modern person it is difficult to see charnels as sacred sites, places of eschatological hope. Instead of \textit{timor mortis}, provoking fear of death, ossuaries and charnel houses were religious as well as historical sites. They were usually visited by whole families in order to see the remains of their ancestors and at the same time to pass on their family history.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Paul Koudonaris has written extensively on charnels, ossuaries and bone chapels. They are suprisingly common in Europe and most of them still exist.

Paul Koudonaris, The Empire of Death (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011)

\textsuperscript{13} Koudonaris, 15.
What defines a funeral

A funeral can be defined as a ceremony that marks a person’s death. It can be an event to celebrate, respect, sanctify or remember the life of a person who has died.

The rituals connect the person to a cultural context such as the customs and religious beliefs. Other defining elements of a burial ritual are space, time and wealth.\textsuperscript{14} The availability of these attributes also affects the way a person can be buried. One of the most banal examples of this would be the Egyptian pharaohs who evidently possessed all three attributes in abundance.

The form and meaning of the ceremony is defined largely by religious beliefs. If the decedent was a member of the Lutheran church and his/her last wishes were not known a Lutheran service would be held regardless of whether the person was considered to be religious or did they practice the faith or not.

In a modern ritual, Lutheran and others, remembering the life of the person is a strong defining feature. In Finnish funerals and memorials everything from the speeches to the coffin, sometimes

\textsuperscript{14} Christopher Tenwalde, “Human Spaces: Spaces for the Dead”, (lecture, Aalto University, Helsinki, March 24, 2014).
even the catering, is often considered from the viewpoint of the deceased. To find meaning in a funeral ceremony in addition - or despite - the religious content this can be summed up to be a representation of the deceased as a person.

Everything we do - our job, relations, our choices as a consumer - function as building blocks for our identity that is visible to others. In a funeral this is done as a retrospective. It is an interpretation of the family and friends left behind. We often hear the phrase “he/she would have liked this” said by attendees in connection of a successful ceremony. This is a depicting phrase that contains two things: firstly if the deceased had been able to take part in what took place, we assume it would have been in accordance to his/her taste, and secondly because of this “likeability” the ceremony represented who he/she was as a person.

This underlines the fact that the ceremony in indeed meant for us, the living. This actually isn’t a new thought. Even considered out of religious aspects it was already in the views of reformators in Christian Sweden and Finland that a funeral was seen as a service for the living and catholic remnants, like requiems, were left out.15

15 Lempiäinen, 200.
In addition to religious needs - especially since they seem to be of ever decreasing importance\textsuperscript{16} - we seem to have a need to create something that would depict a person in the best way possible. This naturally entails that the decedent should have family or friends left to take care of such matters. If all the relatives have passed away, or were not in good terms with the deceased, it can make the service to be nothing more than a formality. In such a case, if no preparations were made in advance, the person is represented only by the coffin - which unfortunately is most likely selected for its price and availability.

\textsuperscript{16} Especially if the number of people leaving the Evangelical Lutheran Church - which is the largest church in Finland - can be considered as an indicator. According to the website eroakirkosta.fi (a site established in 2003 to make resigning from the church easier) by May 20th 2014 411864 have already resigned through the service of the website.

http://eroakirkosta.fi/ (retrieved May 2014)

According to the statistics of the church when compared to 2012, in 2013 the amount of resignations increased by 43,5%. The total drop in the membership count was only 0,9%, but the trend seems to be growing.

What is a coffin

If a funeral is a ceremony that marks the death of a person as well as depicts his or her life, what is a coffin?

To over simplify, a coffin is a box that encases a body - the remains of a person.

The actual tradition of putting the deceased in a coffin is an ancient one well-known also outside Christian traditions. For the early Christians burying the body replaced cremation because it suited better with the belief of resurrection of the body. However, the early Christians didn’t use coffins for their dead, instead the bodies were wrapped in shrouds.

In Finland coffins weren’t always used by default either. In the Middle Ages, and long after that, the use of coffins was limited to the use of the rich. This was due to the high prices of coffins. The majority of the population was carried to the grave on stretchers. The stretcher could be covered with a cloth that was put into grave with the body for an extra charge.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) Aaltonen, 56.
In 19th century before a person was set into a coffin it was placed on a ruumislauta, literally meaning a body board. This was a board traditionally made of one or two roughly two meters long planks. The deceased would then lie on it usually in the barn waiting for the funeral to take place. The body would remain there until the night preceding the burial when it was brought inside the house for the wake. Such boards were the property of one family or a village and as such were in use for centuries.

From the Christian viewpoint there are commonly two essential features in modern coffins: ordinarily they bear 1-4 small crosses, that act as a reminder of that the salvation is dependent on the crucified Christ who defeated death and was resurrected. They also contain a plaque with the name of the deceased - “rejoice because your names are written in heaven”.

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18 Juha Pentikäinen, Suomalaisen lähtö - kirjoituksia pohjoisesta kuolemankulttuurista (Helsinki: SKS 1990), 70.

19 Lempiäinen, 243.

20 Lk. 10:20 AV
In the funeral service the coffin represents the decedent. It can express the lifestyle and beliefs as well as the hobbies of the deceased. This can be reflected for example in the material selections, colours and decorations. Even though personal choices are encouraged, in practice most coffins in Finland are bought from the same wholesale company that is owned by funeral homes. This basically narrows down the options for personalization. A Finnish coffin is most commonly made from pine, which is a relatively cheap material. The prices range from 248 to 3500 euros and can go even up to 3900 euros in the case
of oak coffins. In the case of a cremation - contrary to common beliefs - a coffin is still needed for the transportation and keeping of the body as well as the cremation process.

Handicraft traditions

In many Fenno-Ugric traditions it has been axiomatic that everything was made by hand - things needed for funeral were no exception. Even if machines would have been available to take over the handicraft the real underlying reasons are cultural and religious.

Ancient Finns thought of the grave as the home of the deceased and the coffin as their house. Making a coffin shaped like a boat was a tradition known to most Finnish related and Scandinavian people. It was a way to provide the dead with a vessel that could cross waters in their journey. After all Manala, the netherworld of Kalevala, was located beyond a river called Tuonela. The coffin was called ruuhi, a punt. It was commonly made of a single trunk

\[\text{Footnote 21: An evaluation of the costs of funerals made by Helsingin Sanomat}\]

of wood big enough to house a body. It was to be made as soon as the “dying will blow their last breath”. The wood shavings that came from it were to be hidden so that they wouldn’t be seen by anyone living. In addition to decorating the *ruuhi* with linen a small window with a glass was also made so that the person inside could see out.\textsuperscript{22}

In the mythology of Kalevala, the Finnish national epic, death and life were seen as competing forces. Kalevala is often thought to depict the Iron Age, but it’s roots can even go as far as to the Stone Age and it is most likely a mixture of various influences since it was written down only in the previous century and as an oral tradition it could naturally have evolved over time. Despite the lack of specific timing it does give an insight on the attitudes towards death. Life was essentially rejecting death, a force that was ever present. Death was not an end but a transformation to another state of being and the transition was like taking a voyage on water.

Also in Western Finland several older people had a coffin made ready waiting to be used. The bottom was often laid with straws or wood shavings but some also decorated theirs more

\textsuperscript{22} Kiiskinen, 16-17.
elaborately. In the east as well as the west the body was dressed in their best outfit.  

23 Pentikäinen, 69.

24 Ildikó Lehtinen, Marit, Mordvalaiset ja Udmurtit (Helsinki: SKS, 2005), 16.

Current regulations

It is many times assumed that Finland has a law for nearly everything. So if someone wants to take the personal route and build a coffin or make an urn for himself or herself, or for a relative, what does the law state? What are the regulations concerning them and what has to be taken into consideration when designing or manufacturing one?

In contrast to other Nordic countries Finland is actually the only one without legislated limitations concerning the materials of coffins and urns. Although the materials used have generally been safe and environmental friendly there isn’t an organ responsible of supervising the quality. Instead Finland has unofficial recommendations concerning coffins and urns made by Suomen Hautaustoinnann Keskusliitto, which is a central union for Finnish funeral industry. In addition a quality system has been established that, at least in theory, could help professionals as well as consumers to identify most environmentally viable options. Currently the recommendations are meant to aid

26 The recommendations can be found in Finnish from the website of Suomen Hautaustoinnann Keskusliitto.

cemeteries and crematories to decide whether the coffins are compliant and suitable for the intended use. However, even these recommendations aren’t currently monitored by anyone and no sanctions will follow from breaking them. It also has to be said that an interested consumer has to make a real effort in order to find these recommendations at all.

The quality recommendations cover required qualities of coffins and urns. They concern mainly industrially made products but are also applicable to ones made by individuals. They specify in detail all aspects that need to be considered in the making process.

The regulations focus on the practical, environmental and safety aspects, and when considering these making a coffin becomes a lot more complicated than a mere box. On coffins the regulations impose that they must be built sturdy enough to endure handling and transportation as well as storing the body. The lid for example must be able to withstand a stress of 1100N divided 300x100mm area. The maximum measurements are also defined in the recommendations: they cannot exceed 210 cm (length) 75cm (width) and 60 cm (height). The coffin has to be made of environmental friendly materials - meaning that it is decomposable and flammable so that it is suitable for being either buried or cremated. The material to be used can be real
wood or various sheet materials. All the materials, including the glue, must be compliant to Scandinavian or the European Unions environmental criteria. This includes the finishing that has to be made using water-based lacquers, paints or natural waxes. When using fabrics for interior or exterior decorations natural fibres are preferable. Also, if any decorations are made of incombustible materials they have to be removable from the outside. In addition to the ones mentioned above many other details are also covered within the recommendations. These include liquid isolation, the markings that need to be made on to it as well as the flammability of the used materials.

The flammability is exemplary in the fact that despite all the recommendations made none of the problems are factually addressed in reality. Compared to the rest of Europe textile covered coffins are almost uniquely very popular in Finland. One type of the popular coffins that uses artificial fibres as covering material has been deemed as dangerous for workers in crematoriums due to its flammability. The central administration of the church and Suomen Hautaustoiminnan Keskusliitto made a motion already eight years ago concerning the use of synthetic coffin materials. Previously the matter was debated in the Ministry of Education and Culture and they declared that it doesn’t fall under their jurisdiction. The current official, the Ministry for the Environment, was dealing with the matter recently.
and decided they are not going to ban synthetic coffin materials. According to the Ministry for the Environment there is no need for new legislation, instead the funeral industry should regulate itself.\textsuperscript{27} A task it evidently has so far been unable to do.

What is the point of having the regulations then? Although not binding in a legal sense - and not factually monitored by anyone - they are a comprehensive collection put together by a group of professionals that give a really good insight on what should be expected of a coffin. As such for anyone wishing to create - or to demand - something more personal they are very useful guidelines and a list of reference.

**New traditions?**

Are handicrafts now completely a thing of the past? Are there other trends concerning funeral customs and grieving and do they overlap other areas of life besides religion, design or art for example?

\textsuperscript{27} Marjo Valtavaara. "Suomen yleisin, vaarallisesti leimahtava arkkumalli ei saa täyskieltoa." Helsingin Sanomat, May 20, 2014.
Handicrafts aren’t completely a thing of the past. They are still used in connection with preparations, but not nearly as widely as before and creating things has become more of a hobby. Most of the objects made now are still traditional in their function, like coffins or various textiles used in ceremonies. But since do-it-yourself is no longer a necessity, crafts have adopted new meanings; making something for a ceremony can be a way for reflecting on your own life and beliefs, being a part of a grieving process or, on a less serious note, simply just experiencing something new.

Even in contemporary society working with hands in combination with the grieving process can start before a person’s death. Riitta Tuominen, a funeral home owner, has written about *arkkupeitto*, a coffin shroud, which is a textile used for covering the coffin. One example Tuominen gives is a coffin shroud made together as a family. It was made for the father of the family who was terminally ill and in the final steps of his journey. The daughter bought a white wool cloth shroud and relatives, close friends and even co-workers of the father were then invited to all join in the making. Even the father himself participated. The joined effort made it possible for each participant to say farewell and the process of grieving began before the actual death.\(^{28}\) The shroud

that was later on used in the ceremony was now something personal and shared, a memory connected to the father.

In Finland various courses in woodwork and textile have been organized particularly for creating objects used in funerals. In Helsinki for example courses have been held for making kuolinpuku, “clothes for the dead”. The courses were in a way a preparation for passing. Led by Benita Puuvuori each workshop consisted of devotion as well as the actual planning and making of the garment. The garments didn’t necessarily have to be made for your own use. During one workshop Sirkka Kuula, a local provost and one of the organizers, wondered that in her career most of the couples even in their eighties haven’t discussed with each other about their hopes regarding funerals.29 The course provided a good way of facilitating discussion on the topic.

In Huittinen the local community college arranged a course to make one’s own coffin. The concept was summed up as “Learning to live by building a coffin”.30 The course was


connected with a lecture series to break the taboos related with death.

The course held in Huittinen isn’t the only example, similar courses have also been arranged in the northern Finland in Kauhajoki\(^\text{31}\) and in Posio,\(^\text{32}\) to mention a few. The most recent one is in Eurajoki Christian Folk High School that currently has a course in their program and the next one will begin in the summer of 2014.\(^\text{33}\)

Still, the fabric-covered coffins are most common type of coffin although personal choices have been emerging.\(^\text{34}\) According to the professionals in the funeral industry making your own coffin isn’t in reality as common as sometimes suggested in the


media.\textsuperscript{35} This is mostly due to lack of knowledge and the lengthy process of fabrication that requires carpentry skills and as well as proper tools.

Another viewpoint towards new traditions could be found in the field of art. Death, like stated before, is by no means a new theme but the way we define art keeps on evolving and can basically adopt anything into its toolbox.

In the case of coffins there are many examples that are meant to be functional as well as art objects. Although our national regulations wouldn’t limit us from creating extravagant resting places the most elaborate ones seem to currently exist outside Europe, for example in Africa, where also the traditions are completely different from ours.\textsuperscript{36}

The traditional African coffins are usually colorful, sculptural and basically made to resemble any shape that is connected to a person. They are made in any form imaginable ranging from a

\textsuperscript{35} Eero Honkanen, interview by Harri Piispanen, Hyvinkää Hautaustoimisto, June 12, 2013.


See also Ghana Coffin, http://ghanacoffin.com
pig to an airplane. Based on the traditional beliefs life continues in the next world in the same way it did on earth. Ancestors are also thought to be much more powerful than the living because they are also able to influence their living relatives. This is partly why families do everything they can to ensure that a dead person is sympathetic towards them as early as possible. The social status of the deceased depends primarily on the importance, success and usage of an exclusive coffin during the burial.

Illustration 4 - A Hammer shaped coffin for a carpenter, Ghana Coffins
In addition to the difference in European and African beliefs, the African designs are most likely too much for the tastes of a European consumer.

So far the various designs in Europe that attempt to personalize the coffin - sometimes by creating sofas\textsuperscript{37} or even pool tables\textsuperscript{38} out of coffins - tend to be awkward and usually fall either to the category of kitsch or are unusable in either purpose. If done to represent a person like in the African tradition this could be seen as a valid choice but most of the non-traditional forms are created either for commercial purposes or for fun without an actual connection to anyone’s wishes.

\textsuperscript{37} Von Erickson Laboratories, http://www.vonericksonlab.com/ (retrieved May 2014)

\textsuperscript{38} Casket Furniture!, https://www.facebook.com/CasketFurniture (retrieved May 2014)
One example of a combined object is a concept of a British furniture designer William Warren. He has designed a shelf that can also be used as a coffin. The object in question can be either assembled as a bookshelf or folded into a simple coffin. It will definitely be a *memento mori* if located in your living room but the problematic is similar with the pool table coffins; it fulfills the criteria of a shelf, in the sense that you can place some objects there, but aesthetically it really looks like it has been built from pieces of a coffin. There is however another intriguing aspect to it: it is not for sale. Anyone interested is able to make their own, the author promises to e-mail the instructions in correspondence

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to a persons measurements. All that is asked in return is a photo of the finished product. In this case what is uninteresting as a somewhat functional design object is a whole lot more interesting as a conceptual and participatory project.

Illustration 6 - Shelves for life-coffin folded as a shelf, William Warren (2005-)
One recent artwork made in Finland was displayed in Imatra. There sculptor Teemu Heikkinen made a coffin in collaboration with a funeral home to be displayed in Taidekoski art festival in 2013. The coffin Heikkinen made is a piece of traditional handicraft, a rectangular monolith-like black box made of wood. As an object it is akin to a traditional sculpture with a black relief on the lid reflecting the theme of flowing water related to the exhibition. Ilkka Ollonen, the funeral home owner who Heikkinen collaborated with, also defines death as an inevitable part of life and that the art project was a new and a welcome way of approaching the subject.


See also the website of Teemu Heikkinen http://www.teemuheikkinen.net
When touching the artistic aspect and personal wishes one example that crosses the border between science and expression is the Body Worlds exhibition. Body Worlds is in a sense a way of teaching anatomy through a display of real bodies. The exhibited bodies are plastinated, a method developed by Dr. Günther von Hagen, which in its essence means replacing the water and soluble fats in a body with a

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polymer solution. The core idea is pedagogical, but the creative side is in the way the bodies are presented: instead of being specimens they are posed playing a guitar, riding a horse or throwing a javelin - which makes experiencing the exhibition like being inside an absurd Disneyland that consists of plastic covered corpses.

Currently in Finland a person is an organ donor unless he/she specifically forbids it.\textsuperscript{42} To go even further you can donate your whole body to the anatomical institutes of universities. Basically what you need to do for this is to fill a will concerning your wishes and send it to the proper institution.\textsuperscript{43} And now, with Body Worlds there is even the option of donating your body to the Institute for Plastination where it will become a part of an exhibition. The donors will in both cases remain anonymous. In the case of Body Worlds, there will be a physical presence, but not in a traditional sense: you might know for a fact that a person has donated his/her body to the institute, but is that body displayed, in which

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\textsuperscript{43} The University of Tampere School of Medicine is one of the many institutions Finnish institutions that constantly needs donations for teaching purposes.

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of the exhibitions it is displayed, is it presented as a whole body and - strangest of all - what instrument or sport is he or she playing in it, will remain unknown. In this sense there would be no need for any traditional objects - unless of course they are wanted in order to have a ceremony separately. If one chooses not to have a monument or a ceremony, a donation might be an option - in a sense the cause itself will become the monument, reflecting your values and choices.

**Ars Moriendi**

Originally *Ars Moriendi*, the Art of Dying, refers to two related anonymous texts in Latin from the fifteenth century. They are essentially a body of Christian literature that provides practical guidance for the dying and to those attending them, informing the dying on what to expect, and prescribed prayers, actions, and attitudes that would lead to a "good death" and salvation.44

When talking about *Ars Moriendi* I think of it as a general practice - this doesn’t mean that religion would have to be abandoned but it definitely isn’t exclusive property of religious doctrine either. I

mean with *Ars Moriendi* a good life that is lived acknowledging and accepting the inevitability of death thus relieving anxiety and leading towards a “good death”.

This can be done in various ways but the gist is in awareness. Taking part in a workshop, getting involved in a project, doing or experiencing art all can be catalysts of contemplation that will lead towards pleating the distance.

But what is the essential reason for doing this? And will it not lead towards feeling more helpless in the face of the inevitable?

One reason to get reacquainted with death is that accepting it is a step in starting to demystify it. The inevitability of becoming a part of the endless rotation of matter shouldn’t be news to anyone in a highly educated country. The demystification doesn’t mean the removal of religious needs. Practicing faith as well as beliefs about what happens after death are another matter.

In a similar way to the Kalevalan beliefs it is even in the modern age quite impossible to think about death without thinking of life. As such the problematic of accepting mortality is, in fact, a question that concerns life. It forms it into a question about understanding limitations, seeing life as an arc that has many phases, the end being one of them. Instead of idolizing youth, to
embrace it while it is there without trying to cling on to it and preparing to embrace ageing.

The Swedish author Gustav Fröding has been claimed to have said that “one has to get used to being dead”. By this he means that only by accepting death you can live a more fulfilling and meaningful life. This has a strong emphasis on the importance of being here in the first place - paying attention and appreciating things that might otherwise go unnoticed. It is a constant process of asking questions like what is important, what do I want to do with my life, what do I believe in and what do the people around me mean to me.

The invisibility of death within our current culture has led us to an absurdity: we are trying to keep a safe distance from something that is inherent. Dying is outsourced in all of its forms. It has become the sole business of hospitals, retirement centers and funeral homes. The outcome of this seems to be that we are really puzzled with it. This distance is most likely the reason for our fears and anxieties concerning the subject - if it is somehow not dealt with, it is more likely to become something even more mystical. It is something that we should address as individuals, since it seems we can no longer do it unified under the banner of religion. I don't think any individual event - or a person, for that
matter - can be blamed for this. But it seems that it is the individual who should spearhead the change.

If we would be willing to accept that our loved ones will eventually die, wouldn’t it make it easier to let go when the time comes? Perhaps we could even be a bit ostentatious about it and throw a big celebration in the memory of the journey that a loved one has travelled. Ars moriendi seems to be something we need to be taught again to pleat the distance.

Not to remain only as surface-deep quasi-philosophy, how should we go about it then, what practical steps could we take? The methods for this are actually so extremely simple that they are quite banal: we need to consider what we want from our ceremonies, talk about the ideas beforehand with our friends and family. At the same time it is possible to begin a conversation on the views and wishes of others. Actual preparations can all be a part of this, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be something as concrete as building a coffin yourself. This depends largely on the resources at hand and the situation we are in.

Another thing is to start paying attention to the services that we have outsourced: do we want to isolate our relatives into retirement homes, would we want to be in one in the future, do we want to have something outside the range of white-cloth
covered pine coffins. If we haven’t thought about these things beforehand, we most likely are unable to demand what we actually want from the ceremony - let alone the lifetime we spend on this side of the border - and assume standardized rituals that are not meaningful for us.
3 METHODS

My way of learning Ars Moriendi takes mainly place through conversations. It also manifests itself in my art practice. In this chapter I will describe what I mean with art, specifically environmental art, and what are the accents within it.

Environmental art is a headline that can be understood in a variety of ways. In the widest sense it can be seen as an art form that concerns itself with time and space, as such it can basically entail anything from land art to happenings. What I consider it to be and how my practice is situated inside this vast field of possibilities needs to be clarified.
I - Environmental Art

Although a human being in any surroundings can be considered to be a part of nature and although environmental art is often considered to have a connection to nature it isn’t a synonym for it. The relevant definitions for environmental art can be found elsewhere.

Essentially environmental art is the art of spaces. It is stratification of meaning in space, layering everything that constitutes it, social and material spheres, with new meanings created by the artwork. For example a market square and everything connected to it - the history and function as well as the current conditions, weather and people - can become a playing arena of new meanings for the duration of an artwork if a performance is organized within the boundaries of the square. Environmental art is a place, a meaningful space, making the site important.

Another key element that arises from is spatiality is time. The works can be permanent or temporary but time is addressed in either case. A performance within the market square is temporal, it takes place only once and as such it is always unique even if it
is to be repeated. The statue in the same square on the other hand is there to stay, it envelopes time in another way, although the work itself is static it is in constant change of conditions affecting the ways it is experienced: the changes in the structures or buildings around it, corrosion of material, light and weather conditions, possible vandalism, your mood and background and possibly even the mind-set of a guide presenting the work. With permanent and temporary works the physical positioning within a space might be constant but the surroundings change, this is to be considered when creating an environmental work of art since these are contributing factors.

By nature environmental art is public. To quote professor Markku Hakuri:

“Art is a gift, not a product.”

This lightens the relation with publicity well. The works created are public in a sense that they are rarely owned by anyone - they rarely occupy the walls of private collectors. Of course environmental art can be commissioned and owned but this is often limited to organisations, museums for example. Of course anything can be productized - through books, videos, postcards and such - but the core, the actual work usually isn’t for sale.
The pieces are located within a certain time and space. Inside those parameters they can be accessed by anyone who knows where the piece is located and has means to go there - or happens to come across it accidentally. A gift is not always asked for or expected and as such it can be pervasive by nature: experiencing it cannot be always prepared for be it a public performance or a sculpture. Operating in the public sphere everything is subordinate to discussion that leaving stories behind - that are again one form of publicity as well as a way enjoying the work itself. The aftermath of a particular piece is hard to predict because it simply cannot, nor should it even try, to please everyone. Some of the public sculptures as well as interventions can remain a matter of debate for decades. Every work made doesn’t have to be accepted by everyone - and in a pervasive form environmental, as well as all other artworks, can act as catalysts. Still for an environmental artist awareness of the gifts we are giving and their possible impacts is important.
II - Responsibility towards nature and social responsibility

Consumption of natural resources is not only necessary but also natural. Basically, if we want to exist at all we always end up using resources. At minimum our bodies use constantly energy, so we need to refuel it by eating. And if we were to create something - which most people do, artists being no exception - it requires in most cases a lot more than mere food. And since I don’t consider art to be an autistic practice nor do I consider the culture it contributes to be the pinnacle of all needs in a Maslowian way, I see the use of resources in order to make art completely justified. It would be harder to justify the creation of Luis Vuitton bags, for example.

Still, being an artist doesn’t relieve me from responsibilities towards my surroundings. All acts have to be justified - spending of resources being no exception. As Ossi Naukkarinen has put it:

“Artists are responsible for what happens around them in the same extent as everyone else, from their own points of departure. When making art and dealing with art you have to..."
understand its consequences to yourself and the environment and be prepared to justify your action in public.”^{45}

So, at a minimum the same level of responsibility applies to artists as to everyone else. Perhaps it is even higher since an artist’s actions are ones that are done in public and become somewhat more visible. If I were to buy an Adidas shirt as a consumer it is more an environmental issue than buying the same shirt as an artist. It doesn’t remove the environmental responsibility but it shifts the weight more towards social responsibility.

^{45} Ossi Naukkarinens, Art of the Environment (Helsinki, Finland: University of Art and Design, 2007),106
III - Artistic practice

Environmental art sets a frame for working. Inside it the methods are defined by artistic practice.

As an artist I’m constantly trying to define and refine my practice and methods and figure out ways to explain and talk about them with others. Most of my recent works have revolved around the realm of performance in one way or other, and I intend to continue with the medium. But since it doesn’t constitute the whole picture simply dubbing everything done so far - as well as future plans - as performance would be shortsighted and only partly true. Some of them also have a resemblance with happenings: they are repeatable, but aren’t as holistic still remaining inside the realm of art, which would mostly contradict at least Allan Kaprow’s view on happenings.

What is it that I do then? Here I intend to dwell on the specifics of “what is my practice”. At the same time this - if anything - is my current manifesto.

Still, it has to be noted that in every attempt made to categorize my work I have had no choice but to accept that there is a flux within my own practices, as I assume also to be in the practices
of others. This leads to a realization that the day when I might renounce all of this as a passé-phase can really loom somewhere in the unforeseeable future. But until that happens, I attempt to create works that are temporal, personal and repeatable experiments.

**Temporal**

I have gradually been moving further and further away from the pure production of permanent objects. Or, at least now the reason for making them has changed. I no longer create objects as the end product - they are made as tools for something more fleeting and transitory by nature. These can be parts of installations, performance objects, objects to be used in photos or video, or even props for urban games but currently they never constitute the entire work - they have a live component as well, participatory or performing for example.

Recycling objects, ones already made or found, is also a big part in creating works. The same suitcase for example has now been a part of three different installations.
If the works are temporal, how does my past works exist now, in this moment? As few photos, a scribbled description of few lines on a website or a book, possibly as memories retold as stories by the audience. The works are tied to the time and place where they have happened. They are now tales of an odd event in the past like a crashed UFO. Perhaps the stories, no matter how small, will be my legacy. Instead of (or in addition to) leaving only a heap of unmanageable objects I try to leave experiences.

**Personal**

I try to make art from a “1st person perspective”. What I mean by it is threefold:

art I create is based on personal experiences,
the artist should be ready to improvise and to evolve with the process of performing and creating the work, and the maker(s) and the participator(s) of the piece are a pertinent part of its audience.

When basing works on personal experiences a question of egocentricity might be raised - which I can plead guilty of. It is an aspect of all creative areas of life, ranging from arts to sports,
from play to work. Each contains an element of “look what I can
do”. And once this is accepted, dwelling on it is not only
uninteresting but also pointless.

My life constitutes my material. It is making the mundane into art,
taking the ordinary into the realm of the extraordinary. I think I
can still call myself normal. I had a relatively safe and uneventful
childhood that wasn’t disrupted by shattering events, natural
catastrophes’, war or a broken family. Even so, if I wouldn’t tell
things from a personal perspective I think there would be nothing
to say. Getting wrapped up in exiting stories and using them as a
source of inspiration is drifting to another reality that I am not
familiar with. It would be making art out something I don’t know.
The artist isn’t a genius. Besides, by being Joe-average the
findings made are more likely to have something in common with
most people.

A personal touch on art also moves it away from fiction. Based
on real events what is made is a continuum of something that
has actually happened. It connects with “the normal”, by which I
mean everything that is still outside the bubble of things called
“art” - or at least things not yet solely defined as art. The
connection is important because I don’t see the point of making
art for arts sake - although let it be allowed to those who for some
reason wish to pursue it. My aspiration in art is trying to
understand and improve my life as well as the life of those around me.

An Experiment

“Imagine something never before done, by a method never before used, whose outcome is unforeseen. Modern art is never like this; it is always art.”

Improvisation, reacting to changes and unexpected occurrences, underlines art as a process. It doesn’t stop after the concept, in the realization of it, nor does it usually end even after that. It is an experiment.

Art should also engage people who aren’t inside the art bubble, meaning others than professionals or aficionados. It shouldn’t always demand a vast knowledge of art history in order to experience it. We as artists are sometimes under the delusion that a work of art has as big impact outside our small circles as it

might have within it. After the media (old school and social) gets its grips on it such an impact might happen. But then we can easily get bogged down into talking about killing a cat on a video\(^{47}\), exhibiting child porn in a tent\(^{48}\) or encouraging nudity in a dance piece\(^{49}\) instead of the actual content of the work - let alone the intention of the artist.


A nearly iconic example a public discussion eluding the intention of the artist by focused on one detail of a larger work despite, or possibly due to, the fact that only a rare few have actually seen it. Mäki has written more about My Way and what he considers to be justifiable as art in the essay Cat contained in Mäki’s book Darkness Visible - Essays on Art, Philosophy and Politics (Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts, 2007)


The installation was made in the Kluuvi gallery. It was confiscated by the police after a request for an investigation made by one of the visitors in the opening of the exhibition. More about the art work, confiscation of it as well as the legal process that followed in the book Juulia Jyränki, Harri Kalha, Tapaus Neitsythuorakirkko (Helsinki: Like, 2009)

\(^{49}\) Satu Tuomisto: Riisuttuna, contemporary dance, 2014

Riisuttuna (Bare) is a work combining dance and music that hit headlines mostly due to the fact that not only performers, but also the audience, is naked during it. More about the work and links to related articles can be found from the artists website http://www.satutuomisto.com/ (referred August 2014)

What can we conclude from this? As far as the response is concerned, we create things and have little or no control over what eventually happens. Each work is a mystery. With that being said it doesn’t make the intention completely void - it should be available in one form or the other, be it a statement or a conversation - but it is useless to claim that it is always conveyed the way we would want it to. The emphasis should be kept on the event itself. Intention is there to define why the work was made, it is necessary as a justification when we are actually asked about it (or end up in court). In a multifaceted language such as art the amount of possible interpretations is a richness.

Anything can be adopted into the creative toolbox and I think we have a lot to learn from other disciplines. To produce experimental experiences outside our bubble it is plausible to use the unordinary - a performance, an intervention, an installation, a game, an X - there where it was set to motion: within the context of the ordinary, on the street, in the shopping mall, in the forest, in the corridor, at your working place, in your home.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not against galleries. They are a convenient format for us artists: an established setting where you can highlight exactly the details you want. However, it is a stage separated specifically for art, and as such it shouldn’t be the
default option for it. Other venues should be explored with a voracious appetite.

Within a gallery you know that what you are looking at is art. In experimentation the line between art and life should start to blur.⁵⁰ If you would come across the same work on the street the effect would most likely be different. That encounter can be surprising, even life changing at best. Of course it can be indifferent as well but it is false to assume that that couldn’t happen within a gallery. Defining a work clearly as art doesn’t make it more effective by default - it just makes it clear that it is to be considered as art.

The same difference can be found between theater and performance: when you enter a theater and take your seat, a suspension of disbelief takes place, you know it’s not real. In a public performance happening on the street the line isn’t always so clear: is the person an outpatient or is he performing? Mixing the public sphere with the sphere of art is also experimenting on the two, what they are and what they can be. An act done on the street can, and is meant to be watched, and in mixed contexts

⁵⁰ Alan Kaprow referred using everyday events as an artwork as blurring the line between art and life, “where art become life” and “life refuses to be itself”.

Allan Kaprow, 81.
the actions can have an impact and become meaningful also within the street.

Boiled down to its core, a performance is an action that is carried out. It’s not necessarily performed with the audience in mind in the sense that might be boring, unbearable or even impossible to watch which emphasizes the importance of the concept.

A Concept

If an artwork is an experiment, it is also one that can be repeated. Each piece I make has a set of guidelines. The guidelines (a concept, a score, a script, the rules) are written down as few lines - some made public, some scribbles in my notebooks. They define a piece and set it apart from other works. When the concept is written, it allows the work to be repeated and varied, in theory also by anyone that has access to it.

The more important the concept is, the more visible it should be if it is to be presented as a part of a work: it could be hung from a wall or given as handouts or published so that the work can be enjoyed as a text. No iteration of the same piece has - or even
can - be the same. Any component is subject to change depending on the location, the weather, your mood or even the drunken guy in the audience.

Creating concepts doesn’t confide the content of the work only to what the artist brings into it. Especially in pieces that have an active public element, they are performed, installed or happen usually in an open setting. This allows, or forces, to adopt the unforeseeable into the work. What happens between the lines is the story, the interesting bit, which is the experience inside the process. The lines and the preparations after that are just what brought you there.

For example, you are doing a performance on a public street that involves interaction with the passers-by. It catches the attention of the police who interrupts what you are doing. This could be considered as a failure in a theater piece but now it is a part of the result. Your actions have led to this and the incident has now become a part of the piece - whether you wanted it or not. But instead of considering the work as a failure new interesting avenues are there ready to be explored. The real work of an artist is now at hand. Decisions have to be made on the spot, how to continue - can you, for example, ask the officer to participate or include him in what is happening?
Creating the few lines for the concept sets a frame to operate in, so it’s not purely happenstance. After the lines are enacted the experiment begins. Intentions set it in motion and a hypothesis can be made, but as with any experiment it would be false to come up with the end result before the actual work has taken its course. The work can, of course, end up with a completely different meaning or end up being irrelevant, but taking something and running with it is a part of experimentation. The biggest risk is to make bad art. But with the possibility of making and experiencing something completely new and wonderful, it is a risk worth taking.
IV - Influential works

Inside the theme of mortality there are countless examples in the field of art. Below are some examples of artworks that are connected to the theme, to the sphere of environmental art or both. Some of them are located within galleries and some outdoors but all of them have had an influence, or are in some ways comparable or essentially connected to my practice and the works created within the process connected to the thesis.
Künstler Nekropole can be defined as an environmental artwork. It is in its essence a cemetery in the middle of nature. Within it artists were given the opportunity to design their own gravesites. The area currently holds several monuments of artists designed with the concept of once being buried there. Located in the forest close to Kassel-Harleshausen around a pond Blauer See, “the blue lake”, nine gravesites of the 40 planned are currently
already in place essentially waiting for their creators to die, the oldest dating from 1992 and the latest 2011.\textsuperscript{51}

Its conception lies in the 1980s, when German artist Harry Kramer had the idea of operating a necropolis for artists in Kassel with the intention of creating a public place where the artist is his own independent authority.\textsuperscript{52}

Harry Kramer himself died in 1997 in his house at Brasselsberg in Kassel. His ashes were buried according to the wish of his widow on the grounds of the artist's necropolis in the forest.

Kramer's notion of creating an area where one can take charge of one's final resting place without hindering legislation or directives is intriguing and can be seen as both a \textit{Memento Mori} as well as a way to learn \textit{Ars Moriendi}. It is constitutively a collection of representations of different artists in the form of the monuments they created for themselves.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Dirk Eckart, Die Kasseler Künstlernekropole: ein Buch für kunstinteressierte Spaziergänger (Kassel: Libri Books on Demand, 2000)
\end{itemize}
In 2010 the Museum of Modern Art in New York held a major retrospective exhibition recreating many of Marina Abramović’s performances. During the run of the exhibition, Abramović performed "The Artist is Present," a durational piece of 736 hours and 30 minutes. In it she sat immobile and silent in the museum's atrium while spectators were invited to take turns sitting opposite her. As one of the iconic pieces of performance art it remains the longest durational piece she has done to date. The Artist is
Present was extensively documented, even recording the time that each visitor spent sitting opposite to her.\textsuperscript{53}

In the performance Abramović does exactly what title suggests: is present. She offered a possibility to connect in a very minimalistic fashion, without the use of words simply through the act of looking. Each spectator was encouraged to sit silently across her for a time of their choosing, in a sense using her as a sort of a mirror.

The work took on a level of a spectacle due to the media coverage, the sheer length of the piece and the vast numbers of people keen to participate in it. Despite the scale of it, the performance possibly offered a small quiet moment to many even in the middle of a buzzing museum.


The Maybe was a performance piece created in 1995 for the Serpentine Gallery in London. It started as collaboration between artist Cornelia Parker and actress Tilda Swinton who asked Parker to collaborate with her on the project and to create an installation in which she could sleep.
The work consisted of Swinton laying asleep in a glass vitrine. Swinton's original idea was to lie as Snow White in a glass coffin, but through the collaboration the idea evolved into her appearing as herself. A version of the piece was later re-performed in Rome 1996 and again at MoMA in 2013 without Parker's involvement.

During the performances people would sometimes whisper obscenities to Swinton through the glass. This made her feel vulnerable and caused her to have shingles by the end because of the stress it caused. Parker speculated that it most likely wouldn't have happened if she had been in a role and wearing a costume. Because she was just being herself, people could project much more onto her, which made her more receptive.54 I consider this to be only partly true. As yourself you are more likely to be more receptive and vulnerable but a fictive character would give even more freedom to the spectator: since the actions are then directed towards a character - i.e. a person that is not real - this might make you less inhibited, but also for the very same reason a role can function as a protective mask that is the target of those actions. It could be speculated that some people saw fit to react in a distasteful manner was more due to her

appearing to be sleeping and unresponsive to surrounding events.

The Maybe takes on the idea of presence in another sense when compared to Abramović’s The Artist is Present. It portrays a person who seems to be unreactive to everything that is going around her. Still, a presence can be seen and felt.
Somersault in Yves Klein Blue was originally performed and exhibited in 2011. Most recently it has been recreated in 2013 for the Wall Works exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, Germany.\textsuperscript{55}


The video of the piece can be found on Vimeo:
The piece consists of a performance, a video and the “traces” it leaves in the space. In the performance Paucar arrives on location, sets his feet inside two small squares of a blue pigment, standing with his back against the wall. After a moment he goes to a handstand, hits his feet against the wall leaving two blue footprints on it and then walks away. The video shown in connection is shot on location revealing the events that created the marks left on the wall.

Although a concept that has been repeated on many occasions Paucar’s work manages to create an impact on the space where it is exhibited, making a space into a place, in a sense it becomes a site-specific work on each iteration.
Elina Piispanen - Tumbleweed (2013)

Tumbleweed was a piece made by Elina Piispanen for a joint exhibition Kropattu56 held together with Minttu Sipola in Stoa-


http://www.stoa.fi/tapahtuma/3151B1DFE703EB9FA98744BECC43BA3C/fi/Minttu_Sipola_Elina_Piispanen_Kropattu
gallery. The exhibition focused on the female body from the viewpoint of the two artists.

Tumbleweed was essentially a video projection Piispanen made dealing with issues of learning to let go of dreams. Although also related to many other personal aspects, one of the issues the artwork dealt with was the difficulty of getting children and the impossibility of adoption. The work was made as an installation consisting of a glass structure and a video that was projected through it. In the video she held the glass structure that was shaped to resemble tumbleweed, stood up and dropped it partly breaking it.

The piece was connected to a point in time where healing was not yet current or maybe not even possible. This surrounds the work in a melancholic atmosphere that continues as an endless loop of the glass being broken and the slightly broken object jutting out in the reality of the spectator.
4 PLEATING THE DISTANCE

Like stated before, I aimed to do my own trip to suture the distance and create art works as a way of getting familiar with the idea of mortality and to illustrate the connections it has with identity, the way we are perceived.

Within the process three works were concepted and eventually realized. They form a triptych that addresses various, in many cases overlapping, elements of life that are connected to mortality, occupations, times of crisis, consumerism, fertility and funerals. The trio is a way to continue learning Ars Moriendi that started from my own crisis and led to researching my grandfather and eventually our death culture and everything related to it. The artworks are direct continuation of the research as well as a way to make it visible and as such open for discussion.

The artworks created in the process are “Body Count”, “Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct” and “It’s a Job”. Each of them contains a sculptural object and a public performing element.
Bodycount

If a coffin is a representation of a person in a funeral ceremony what are the constructions we do knowingly while we live?

In the age of the Internet we all have a virtual profile formed by everything we put online. Even if we would shy away from modern technology we most likely still have it. Then it is composed more or less without our consent and control, possibly in the form of photos uploaded by others, like blog posts and tweets, that will all appear when searching our names in Google.

Despite the increasing nonmaterial dimensions we are all a part of, we still build a profile with material: the clothes we wear, the food we eat, the place where we live, etc. contributes to a visible image formed from our acts. It is an exterior that is built of choices we make - most of which can be considered purely as consumer choices since we rarely manufacture anything ourselves. Most of these choices can’t withstand a closer scrutiny. We often end up choosing unsustainable and unethical options. It could be claimed that we aren’t capable of making informed decisions because there is no data available at the store counter concerning the manufacturing conditions - or often
even the country of origin - of a given product, thus leading to choices that begin with “un”. But in the age of fast communication, specifically the ever-present Internet that we have a constant access to, it has to be said that also ignorance is definitely a choice.

I cannot claim to be above this in any way. I constantly make feeble attempts to be a conscious consumer, trying to buy fair-trade, locally produced and organic products. These attempts usually occur in the beginning of the month. And only if such options are available. For example when it comes to bands I listen to, no matter where they are from, there isn’t a fair-trade option. Sure the bands might be from Finland but the shirts are usually manufactured in Bangladesh, China or Malaysia. And when I’m done with them I will throw them away in Finland.

To over simplify, by supporting a local band I also exploit a worker in Bangladesh by extension.

Needless to say that an un-choice can be the only one we can afford or even the only one offered. This in turn leads to injustice, be it unfair compensation or unhealthy conditions in which the products are made or in the poor quality of the product that needs to be replaced because it simply doesn’t last, is in turn feeding the same cycle once more. All of this doesn’t produce a
better quality of life - in fact it might even shorten it. Since it seems that we leave a heap of bodies in the wake of our need for cheap products, could they be counted? We have ways to measure CO2 emissions of our consumption but a unit of measure for suffering is yet to be discovered.
1st performance score

Choose a product.
Create a suit out of those products.
Try to wear it.
As a part of the piece I created a suit, an empty shell. The performance connected to it consists of attempts to put it on and wear it.

To make the suit I cut up several bin bags of used cuddly toys donated to me by the recycling centre and several friends. As I only used the bodies of the toys a heap of heads were left in the wake of its creation. Sewing it together was a huge undertaking that took more than a month to finish. With all that effort it could have been a high-end product if a professional using something else than discarded toys as the material had made it.

The suit is intentionally made so that it is next to impossible to put on. Under the seemingly funny and cuddly exterior it is very heavy, unbearably hot to wear and extremely difficult to move in. A façade, a self-image made to be seen by others, built of items no one needed has become too rigid and unbearable to be in.
illustration 13 - The suit suspended after the performance
When the suit is worn the only head visible is the one of the wearer - the head that makes the choices. The bodies that make up the suit could be counted. But I don’t think anyone bothered to do that.

Body Count is also related to an earlier piece done in 2011 called I’m made of Plastic. The work was initiated by buying a sports shirt. It was a digital collage essentially consisting of a photo of me wearing an Adidas shirt and an article stating chemical findings in the products.  

57 Greenpeace finds toxic chemicals in branded clothing, AFP, August 23 2011, the same article can still be found from http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iiifYKDOTnwbgWHV9deZS-5VJmRnw?docId=CNG.7109dd0e08ad5a7e68ee758ca10ce74b.6a1&hl=en
Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct

I have recently discovered that I am unable to have biological children. Whatever happens, my genes will stop here. Perhaps in retrospect all this could be considered as a minute detail, because it apparently is a condition that has existed throughout my life. The only change is in awareness.

From the viewpoint of biology death and birth overlap constantly as a continuous process. At the cellular level dying actually begins before we are born. It is a natural and necessary event for the fetus to develop normally. Studies have shown that the reason why most of us don’t end up having webbed fingers and toes is because the cellular structure between them is programmed to deteriorate in order to form separate digits.⁵⁸ So it could be argued that not only does death begin in birth but that it is also quite essential in shaping us.

Being unable to transfer my genes onward there is no continuation. It stops with the last cell that dies completing a

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1200697/
process that began before I was even born. From the viewpoint of genetics a question of immortality can be raised, what do we believe it to be? If it is living through ones offspring am I now unable to live forever, since I cannot have children of my own? If we were to drift towards philosophy I am left with the possibility of mental procreation, at least in the spirit of Plato. This would entail becoming a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, and by doing so giving birth to intellectual children. According to Plato they are a part of even greater immortality than the ones conceived through physical procreation.59

Perhaps art as a mixture of many disciplines can be a form of mental procreation. Making art is often referred as being therapeutic. This in a sense can be true but I am in no way suggesting it to be a complete substitute for it. For me it has definitely been a way of processing but more importantly it is creating a structure that symbolizes, perhaps caricaturizes, how things work.

Encountering something totally unexpected is likely to cause a need of redefinition: the self-image changes. The original construction no longer matches the new parameters and a new position to be in the world needs to be found. Any personal crisis

is likely to set such a process in motion. It could be said that the old image is out-dated, or partly broken, and a new one has to be built to take its place in order to carry on. Obviously the new construction will never be the same as the previous.

Self-portraits - forming and defining our body images and the relation to it - aren’t something that I would exclusively make as an artist: I believe it to be a continuous process for every human being. The relation to the body is in a constant flux of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction.
2nd Performance score

Build a self-portrait.
Allow it to be broken.
Piece it back together creating a new portrait out of the broken one.
Put the new portrait on display.
I constructed an original, a ceramic self-portrait. Made with a plaster mould it is an exact copy of my upper body re-created in stoneware. The performance begins with the deconstruction, in which the sculpture is destroyed, and ends after the reconstruction, in which it is put back together again.

In the beginning of the performance the ceramic portrait displayed on a pedestal is allowed to be broken. After that follows the painstaking and lengthy process of piecing it back together again with glue. During the performance a new form is slowly created from the shards of the original. Naturally it will be impossible to re-create the form exactly the way it was and the new portrait will be notably different, yet bearing some resemblance to the original. The shape and appearance will inevitably be altered: cracks will be visible, some pieces will be too small and some might be lost and new ones accidentally or purposely added to wrong places creating a new image shaped by that particular moment in time.
Illustration 14 - The portrait in the exhibition before the performance
Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct shares a similar site-specific aspect with Paucars Somersault in Yves Klein Blue. Both works leave visible marks as well as their documentation in the space they are performed. Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct is naturally also connected to the Tumbleweed through the topics it addresses. Also both artists form a married couple that factually deal with the same issue. This is done in the individual works of each one and from slightly different perspectives but the problem is a shared one.
It’s a Job

To follow the footsteps of my grandfather Armas Veriö, I intend to take death as a part of my existence, to see if Ars Moriendi can be self taught. In his case apparent awareness of his own mortality didn’t stop him from living a fulfilling and eventful life - quite the contrary.

Building a monument was the first avenue I wanted to travel but that brought up a problem: I don’t know where I’ll be buried. It wouldn’t make that big of a difference either. Having lived in several cities in several countries and felt at home in each one.

One purpose of a gravestone is to mark a place where a person is buried, and as such it would have to be considered as sight specific and making something and then locating it somewhere doesn’t really fulfil the criteria. Even regulations concerning monuments state that before creating one the particular cemetery it is to be located in would have to be consulted in advance. Also it isn’t entirely impossible that I end up beneath the same stone that Armas designed. Considering this I came to a conclusion to make a coffin for myself instead. A vessel that would be ready, no matter where it would travel.
Being basically a box a coffin is perhaps the smallest individual space a body will ever occupy. Does it really matter what it looks like? One thing that several people have mentioned when talking about their own death is that they don’t care inside what and in what way they will be buried. The most extreme example I’ve heard when talking to people about the topic has been “you can throw me in the dump”. I don’t think that the deceased at that point would really care, the body isn’t able to see or feel inside what or where it is left to decompose - but the friends and family of that body definitely would. And if a funeral is a personification of a loved one, throwing the body in the landfill is usually out of the question.

If two boxes were offered, a cheap flat-pack and a personalized feat of craftsmanship, which one would you pick? For most commodities we can buy a store brand especially if we aren’t that picky about quality. Ikea, one of the biggest manufacturers of furniture in Europe, has a wide variety of products that cover all walks of life - with the exception of death. They sell cribs and beds, sofas and kitchens and now even complete apartments\(^{60}\), but they don’t manufacture coffins. Can the reason be that it

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\(^{60}\) Bo-Klok is a housing concept created by Ikea and Skanska.

would be too controversial? Would a consumer shy away from a shop that has a reminder of their mortality? Or is the reason that no one would buy a coffin from Ikea? In Finland there is one aggressively expanding emporium that covers more or less everything, Cooperative Society Elanto (HOK-Elanto). Their business ranges from supermarkets to restaurants, from gas stations to banks. And they have funeral homes. You can actually even get bonus points, a rebate, from buying a coffin. So far a store brand, “a Rainbow coffin”, isn’t yet available.

If one is to follow discussion, for example in Internet forums - where all logical and profound conversation today seems to take place - the most common opinion is that the whole funeral industry is a scam. Coffins cost a fortune and so does everything else related to it. It is generally perceived as immoral to make profit out of somebody’s misery. To a certain extent I could agree with this - but taking care of such matters is a job that the most of us aren’t willing to do. Psychologically it must be arduous having to constantly deal with grief and death. And this happens within a society that doesn’t want to address the whole issue. Basically we moan about the costs of something we don’t want to do in a market economy where one should be allowed to make a profit. If we would genuinely want to lower funeral costs, the whole

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business should be monopolized by the government and paid from the taxes. But I bet we wouldn’t want that either.
3rd Performance score

1.
Make a coffin for yourself.
Ask that it will be used for your funeral.

2.
Select a coffin.
Stay inside it for a working week from 8 am to 4 pm taking each day a lunch break.
I have now built a coffin for myself with the intention of being buried in it. When held on display it would function as a quite powerful item of memento mori - one of the oldest and most enduring themes in art. Making it on one hand is being prepared for the inevitable and on the other an experiment on what the final space that my remains will one day occupy would be like.

The coffin is hand crafted; even the wooden sheets were made instead of buying ready ones. It is compliant with the regulations for coffins in Finland and consists of environmentally viable materials starting from the wood to the finish - even though the regulations could have been bent in any direction without sanctions.
What kind of an image, a visible identity, is shown as the object that is the coffin?

Surprisingly enough, a fairly traditional one, although the form is new compared to the ones found in funeral homes. The box is completely made out of pine, which is the most common material for coffins in Finland, because it is relatively cheap and abundant. The design incorporates, assimilates, two forms into one: a barn and a boat. Instead of being an outrageous and monumental piece of art it turned out to be surprisingly Scandinavian: a shape
with simple lines and one that is even quite functional. It seems to raise a question: Is this who I am after all? Normal, more tied to my culture than I realize. Instead of being unique and extravagant, I am more like everyone else, which, in hindsight is a comforting thought.

In addition to building the object itself it is used in a durational performance. In it I will spend a working week inside the box within the space it is exhibited in. My working day will begin at eight am and end at four pm. In between I may leave the box for a half-hour break at maximum and after having lunch I will return to the box.

Next to the coffin there will be an empty seat that visitors can sit on. Being a part of the idea of having personal conversations with people they are offered a chance to come and talk to me, if they so desire.

A job of an artist is a weird one. Work is often sparked out of personal aspirations, from a need to say something. Most of it is unseen, unpaid and happens also outside regular hours. An artist doesn’t have vacations. From the viewpoint of rest of the society he is unemployed despite working constantly. A third party often funds the work, sometimes it is an institution or a trust, but in most cases the artists themselves pay to get the job done. In a
country with free education it could be said that a lot of money is being invested in something that in the end doesn’t provide a living and produces things that cannot be sold. During a depression when cut backs have to be made on culture, and art in specific, art seems to be the one to go first. Without advocating that it should be healthcare first and then arts it looks like that even in more economically viable times society doesn’t know what to do with artists. And yet it is a profession many choose over the discomfort that other jobs might bring. Being able to work a lifetime for 8 hours a day in an unfulfilling job is a feat that we could definitely learn from.

I will not get paid to do the performance. In fact, it will actually prevent me from working anywhere else during it. If the student allowance provided by Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, can be considered to be my salary it would be 2.72 € per hour.\(^6^2\)

It’s a Job has similarities with The Maybe as well as The Artist is Present. The most striking difference is the scale of the works, 

\(^6^2\) The calculation is based on the monthly student grant of 499.60€ that includes a housing supplement assuming that the half hour spent for lunch is also salaried.

which are naturally different since Parker and Abramović were both presented in big venues like the Serpentine and the MoMa.

Abramović’s piece was widely advertised and people actually lined up outside the MoMa to get a chance to experience it. In It’s a Job the spectator was most likely in the gallery on their own and had to discover the presence of another person. The likeness of the works is again in the idea of a presence conducted in a space of death. And under the theme of art it literally creates “work”, a sort of an odd job, out of it.

Another comparison can be made from the way a connection is made with the audience: instead of looking at the person lying in a glass cube or establishing an eye contact, contact can be taken through conversation. This connection that can be felt creates the space of a generic coffin - albeit one that is built for a specific person - into something more personal that a mere name tag or even an identical copy couldn’t do: it becomes a place that is connected with my person.
5 EXHIBITING

The three works described in the previous chapter are created in connection to the thesis. As repeatable scores connected to objects they are meant to have a life of their own and performed in various places, on the streets as well as inside locations, but first they will be all presented as a triptych in one space: the gallery of Lume Media Centre in Arabia. This will also be the premiere for all the artworks.

Choosing an inside location is ideal for three reasons:

first of all it conveniently collects the works into an entity addressing the same topic simply by putting them within one space,

second it allows experimentation with static objects displayed and performed with in the same space, a gallery-like environment,

and third the space selected is fairly accessible to the audience and an active location that organizes a variety of events
simultaneously possibly drawing in a more varied and randomized audience.

And also since the works are a part of a master’s thesis where they have to be evaluated, they are conveniently located in the same space.
The Gallery space

Although used frequently for arranging exhibitions the Gallery space of Lume is an irregular one and challenging in many aspects. First of all it isn’t a typical white cube, a gallery space in any traditional sense. The shape of the space is a long rectangular. The floor, made of small black wooden blocks, slightly tilts towards the entrance and the end effectively dividing
it in three different elevations, the walls are covered with light coloured plywood and the roof is made of gabled glass that lets a variable amount of light in at different times of the day.

Essentially the space is a corridor that leads to other parts of the Lume centre, such as auditoriums and studios. It is also a fire exit from those spaces. The materials selected to create the space and the fact that it is a corridor, limit the available choices of positioning work there and the ways they can be attached. On to the plywood walls, for example, it is allowed to attach things only with one type of tape effectively reducing the ways they can be utilized.

For the space be the most visible “gallery” in an art school is questionable - if organizing exhibitions is a major part of the work of an artist, one could ask why are the spaces offered by the school effectively unpractical relics that you basically aren’t even allowed to touch?

But if the space is to be viewed as any public space - one that in this case is predominantly used to access other spaces - this actually makes it an interesting one even with all its limitations.

Located on the ground floor it can be easily seen and accessed from the street making it a semi-public space, a continuation of
the university’s main lobby. It is at the same time static and active, which reveals it as an interesting venue for performance. Normally the only movement is passing through the corridor to see an activity at either end, not in it. In that sense it resembles a street that is located inside a building and events that run simultaneously provide frequent and changing audience.
Plans for the exhibition

The exhibition will be titled “Now. After.”

I think of the exhibition it as an evolving process in itself: the space is naturally used in the traditional way to display static objects - the suit, the coffin and the sculpture - but also as an arena where they are used. This makes changes in the overall look and feel of exhibition inevitable. The performances are most likely going to leave visible marks and add layers to the exhibition forming a temporal place in the corridor for a two-week period. Following this thought it is in its most interesting state if visited at several different times during the weeks.

All the artworks are going to be performed within the space and the first two will be documented for video to be shown in connection with the objects.

Bodycount will be performed on 26\textsuperscript{th} of April as the piece that opens the trio. It is essentially performed for video, but the performance can be also seen live by appointment and as such it is possibly seen by a small audience before the exhibition actually opens for public.
Construct/deconstruct/reconstruct will be performed next on 29th of April. The documentation of the performance will be shown in connection to the re-assembled sculpture and the video.

The first part of “It’s a job” is one that in a sense will last for my lifetime and it has started in the summer of 2013. The second part starts on the 5th of May and it lasts until the 9th of May. It is performed in the space making it a live component within the exhibition for the duration of the second week.

For the layout of the pieces my intention is to use the length of the space leaving sufficient area free to do the performances without setting separate stages for them. The gallery as a section that can be closed and separated from the main lobby is in itself already a sort of a stage - even though it is mostly used for passing through.

The performances in the space overlap with other events within the Lume so it is most likely that there will be passing traffic during them. The unpredictability of possible passers-by in the premieres of the performances is the only part that actually resembles street performances. But like stated before, as repeatable scores, the works will also be performed in public places after the exhibition.
For displaying the objects - the sculpture, the coffin and the suit - there are basically two options in the space: either using the middle or using one - or both - sides of the corridor. Since the space is relatively large compared to the works, the suit, which is the biggest and most colourful of the objects, is going to be hung from the ceiling as the last element demarcating where the exhibition ends and the corridor continues changing into the foyer of the studios. The suit is going to be hung there immediately after the performance. After it is in its place the rest of the exhibition will be set up. The way the two other pieces are going to be set in relation to the suit will be decided on the spot on Saturday when setting up the exhibition.

Each object will have two small signs in connection to them providing information about the times and dates of the performances as well as their individual scores. In addition to a printed statement, they constitute the available information. The thought behind it is to give only the most relevant information in a condensed form - and for those interested in further details or my intentions beyond the mere exhibition description text and the scores on the wall can refer either to the statement or come and talk to me during It’s a Job. After all, it is a piece that in addition to a presence consists of conversations and as such offers a rare opportunity for interaction as well as feedback, for anyone wanting to take it in that direction.
6 EXPERIENCES

Now that the works have had their premieres reflecting on the experiences, as well as shortcomings is possible. Some of the performances have already been performed more than once and plans for more in the future are already in motion. However, for the purposes of the thesis I will focus mainly only on the first iterations that were realized in connection to the Now. After. - exhibition at Lume.
Exhibiting the works

The space proved to be as demanding as suspected. The way the works could be presented in it was limited due to the regulations and using the center of the aisle would have been impractical. The most convenient solution proved to be occupying the sides leaving ample space in the middle for the performances as well as a pathway for people passing through the corridor.
Also if the screens showing the documentations were to be placed somewhere without cables running across the width of floor, the only viable option possible was to place them next to the walls.

The constantly changing lighting conditions proved to be challenging for the TVs playing the documentation of the first two performances. On a bright day the sun would shine directly on them making it difficult to see the video even though the screens were placed under stands as an attempt to prevent this. When the sunlight lit the left wall anyone wanting to see the video properly needed to stand really close to the screen to provide enough shade. A small consolation was that this made watching the video like crouching next to the coffin, albeit totally unintentionally. In a similar situation using more luminous screens instead of out-dated televisions is the way to go.
1st performance - Bodycount

Body Count was the first piece to be set up within the space. The performing part took place on Saturday in connection with setting up the rest of the exhibition. Advertised as an event that needed a reservation in advance the first performance was intended mostly as a performance for video. Still, it was seen live by a few keen people.

When the suit was finally complete after several months of toiling it ended up weighing nearly 45 kilos. As planned I decided not to practice with it at all and during the performance it soon became obvious how difficult it really was to get into it, not to mention trying to sit up while wearing it. Once you got in the feeling of wearing it was surprisingly comfortable - like being suspended floating inside a man-shaped beanbag. If it hadn’t been so hot to wear it would have been enjoyable to lie inside it on the floor for longer periods.

Deciding to take getting up as a challenge within the hot gallery space I was determined to find a way to stand up. The result how to accomplish this was found surprisingly quickly: by rocking yourself from side to side made it possible to roll on all fours and
from there it was possible to push yourself up. After getting up the weight was easier to manage. Once standing with the suit I became a sort of a bizarre mascot for a sports club or a theme park.

![Illustration 18 - Bodycount in Lume Gallery, video still](image)

The fact that the toys were all decapitated wasn’t emphasized in any way. Some of the visitors must have realized this on their own but I suspect that it was a detail that went unnoticed by many. Putting the severed heads next to the suit was an option for emphasising this - but then again the simple fact that the dress was a fur coat already implied that something had been “killed” to manufacture it. And since my interest towards rights of
any kind are more those of humans than those of animals, it could have taken the emphasis to the wrong direction.

Body Count was in hindsight physically and mentally easiest of all the performances in the exhibition. The performance could have tolerated a longer duration and can definitely be varied in different surroundings. Luckily, since I still seem to have an appetite for redoing it, it is also easiest of the three to repeat.

When writing this Bodycount has been performed for the second time in Espoon Keskus were I was invited to perform it in connection to Objekti exhibition. In Objekti the performance took approximately half an hour. It consisted of three stages: first dragging the suit in to the lover platform of Espoon Tori shopping mall, putting it on there and then walking to Jukeboxi where it was finally peeled off. This second variant took the piece back to one of the first ideas of how I imagined how and where the suit could be used: to be worn inside a buzzing mall. Needless to say I was exceedingly happy to get the chance to recreate it in those surroundings.

As a part of a triptych in the Now. After. -exhibition it was the only one that survived it completely unscathed; the portrait was shattered and the coffin is still in dire need of restoration. This has a sense of irony that the one made to be a symbol for consumer habits is the only one still in pristine condition.
2nd performance -
Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct

From its conception the second performance was the one to go through the biggest changes on the level of the concept. The initial idea for the performance was to ask a volunteer from the audience to take part and to break the ceramic portrait with a hammer. It would have been a powerful image and an action that would have guaranteed that the portrait would break - which was something that I was worried about in the beginning. But hammering it to pieces would have steered the meaning too far from the idea of something unexpected that results in the shattering of the persona. The shift would have been towards an act of violence, more specifically one that the participator directs against me, and as such becomes a part of the performance making it more about him/her attacking me - and me trying to survive the aftermath. As such I rejected the idea and decided that it should be done in another fashion.
Instead for Construct/Deconstruct/Reconstruct I asked my wife to assist me in the performance. During it we entered the space, turned around and walked backwards until we bumped into the pedestal the portrait was set on. It made it impossible to predict exactly when it would fall and be broken and which one of us - or both of us - would be the one to tip it over. This way the breaking would happen as a result of a mutual journey in the same way as the decision of having children in the first place.

The piece fell along with the pedestal shattering on a black canvas set in front of it. At this point Elina walked away joining the audience and I started to collect the pieces - others could help in the process but primarily the task of piecing your identity
together is something you have to do on your own. After arranging the pieces I realized that reconstructing the whole portrait would be quite daunting: it broke into more pieces than I expected and some of them were way too small. Also the glue might not hold a big structure together so instead of trying to assemble the whole bust I decided to focus on the thing that felt most important to save: my face. After collecting all the pieces and placing the ones that somehow fitted the face I placed the face back onto the pedestal.

Seeing that all that could be done was now done I left the space. The broken pieces on top of the canvas were left as a part of the exhibition.
3rd performance - It’s a Job

The coffin was set close to the wall in the middle of the space. Next to the coffin were placed a coat rack and a chair. The chair served a dual purpose: it was there for anyone that wanted to sit and have a talk as well as for me - when I had my lunch break I needed something to sit on. The coat rack was there as a sign that someone is present. During the performance I hung all my clothes on it, with the exception of the black overalls that I also wore for the other performances. So when I was inside my everyday outfit would hang next to it.

Before the second week started a laminated note was added onto the chair next to it saying:

“Please have a seat. You can talk to me if you want to. I will be here every day from 8am to 4pm.”
For the performance I chose not to have a role of any kind. Whilst inside the box I would try to be myself. I decided not to initiate conversations but I would always reply and talk as long as people wanted to. I saw this as a way of giving the spectator the freedom to approach the work in the way they wanted to. They could decide just to look or to talk as well as set the tone of the conversation possibly making the work more meaningful for them. The point of remaining talkative was to create encounters and even explain my motivations for doing this which seemed to be the most common question asked after “Isn’t it hot in there”.

To remain talkative was an interesting choice. The conversations ranged from idle chitchat to more profound, from the weather to interpretations of the work. The reactions varied. Many referred it to a confessional, it was in a sense like talking to a priest where
you could say whatever you wanted to get off your chest without being accountable for it. Some people actually even came back during the week because they felt that they had found the piece really meaningful for them. One man stated that there was no art in the piece as far as he was concerned. During the last day of my working week my parents also came to talk to me. My father said that he would rather have the coffin for himself since he was most likely to need it before me.

Below are some quotations from conversations that took place while I was inside the coffin:

"I don't know why this would be art."

"You could work at nights and then come and rest in there during the day."

"This is like I'm talking to someone in the afterlife."

"That's basically what most people do every week; try to suffer in a job they really can't stand."

"I brought my dog with me today to see if he reacts to you in anyway. He seems to be more interested in scratching himself."
“Can I open the cover? I want to know what it looks like on the inside.”

“I don’t believe that you are really in there. You must have a microphone and a speakers set inside the box.”

“I’m borrowing your hot-wire cutter.”

During the week there were long periods, often in the mornings, when no one came to talk to me. Many times I could hear footsteps closing in and then stopping, possibly to read the text or just to look at the coffin. It apparently was the choice of many not to have a conversation. And since the initiative was given to the spectator this can be considered as a natural part stemming from the nature of the work.

The experience of being inside was meditative and exhausting at the same time. It was physically demanding due to the heat and limited movement inside a confined space. There wasn’t enough room to be completely relaxed, to turn or even to lie on your side. Lying on your back one arm had to be clenched the whole time because the sides were slightly too close for comfort. This might shed some light to why bodies are sometimes positioned with
their hands on their lap or over the chest. And obviously, in the normal use of a coffin numbing of an arm of wouldn't be a problem.

The time I spent inside was roughly seven and half-hours each day. I left the box only once to have a 15-30 minute lunch break. Leaving it actually felt uncomfortable because it became easy getting used to not seeing anyone - and suddenly you leave what had become a comfort zone finding yourself sitting out in the open on a chair unprotected. What was initially thought of as a welcomed breather from lying in a confided space - in addition to being parallel to a typical working day break - actually felt unsafe. Trying to enjoy the break and eating sandwiches unexpectedly became more of a task. As such I didn’t want to linger outside for too long. Despite the lack of an actual time limit I suppose spending more time outside could also have started to feel like cheating.

Being inside the box was comparable to many things. While lying in the humid darkness the first thing that immediately came to mind was human smuggling. The second was, strangely enough, a being inside a womb. In both instances there would be insufficient room to move, you would most likely have sensations of the outside without being able to affect them much. The other was part of the thematic of work, a sort of an “emotional death”
that many people suffer by sticking with a job that they hate. Naturally the biggest difference with all comparisons above was that I had the luxury of being able to leave whenever I wanted.

Being in a space intended for the dead while communicating with the living connected with some historical aspects as well as beliefs. For a short while the “dead” belonged to the every day spaces of the living, like in the Stone Age. The time spent within the coffin can also be associated with death as a voyage similar to the Kalevalan beliefs, now of course the voyage was a day’s job instead of being a one-way ticket. The Ancient Finns also thought of the coffin as a house, and due to the job thematic perhaps it could now be modernly seen as an office.

In several early rituals people - especially influential people like rulers - were buried along with their valuable possessions, treasures or even living servants. For my visit to a space of death I had taken water in a camel-pack and a tiny battery-operated fan. Not exactly the insignia of a man of great influence. Nonetheless both of them proved to be invaluable in my time inside, more so than a gold bullion for example, so maybe I should take heed from this and ask to be buried in the real event prepared with similar gear. In addition to these I had an alarm clock set to tell when it was time for lunch and when it was time to call it a day.
One issue that could have been addressed in It’s a Job was in creating the ambience and it is something to think about when repeating the performance. Talking about mundane issues while inside the box wasn’t a problem as such, but the surroundings could have been calmer. If people came one at a time they definitely could set the mood to the conversation as intended but during the current set up if there happened to be someone already talking with me it must have immediately affected everyone else in the space as well. So if the people already next to the coffin were telling jokes for example it must have set the mood for everyone else present in the gallery as well. When the work is to be repeated it might be a good option to let people in one at the time. It could also be interesting to try it in various environments, like open public spaces, squares or shopping malls. Still, since in its current form as a performance that wasn’t widely advertised as a spectacle it remained as a part of a seemingly static exhibition allowing moments of discovery when people read the text, put two and two together, and suddenly realized that there really is someone inside the coffin.

The other shortcoming in It’s a Job regarded the construction of the box itself - or rather the way I used it. Normally the body within it shouldn’t breathe. Now it did, which in turn accumulated a lot of moisture inside it. This connected with the hot gallery
space made the wood warp. Already after the second day inside some emergency repairs had to be done so that the gap formed between the lid and the side could be closed. At the end of the third day the opening had gotten bigger, the side was bent for approximately 5 centimeters from its original position. I started to think seriously about changing it into the prototype coffin but since as far as the performance was concerned I was supposed to outlive the coffin anyway, it seemed fitting if it would actually break during it. And restoration work could always be done after the exhibition, if needed. Instead of changing the coffins I added a small box of silica inside to collect the humidity and a latch on to the cover that would keep it in check. The silica didn't seem to make much of a difference but the latch kept the side in check - at least until Friday, the last day of the performance, roughly a couple of hours before the end of the performance, when someone decided to open the lid by force. This was a totally unexpected situation that once more ripped the gap open. This led to a situation of me staring at the elderly gentleman and the group he was with holding the latch in my hand until he closed the lid as quickly as he had opened it. I was quite baffled by the event and wondered who decides to treat an object that most would consider to be sacred like a toy. For a while I tried to screw the latch back in place, which obviously proved to be impossible while lying inside, and since getting out at that point really wasn’t an option so I simply had to cope with a gap in the lid till the end
of the performance. Becoming a part of the piece it definitely left me with something more to think about.

illustration 22 - Getting up at the end of the week
To sum it all up, what am I left with? What kind of an experiment was conducted? As I consider art to be a continuous process of experimentation which goes on long after writing this text, I won’t even try to claim to have conjured an ultimate answer, but some of the questions raised during it can, and should, be addressed before signing out.

Why are the artworks environmental art?

For one, they contain that currently trendy sustainability of a real attribute, instead of being just a buzzword, using recycled and sustainable materials. The only exception was the portrait, but it can still be displayed in connection with the documentation in future exhibitions.

More importantly they are all also artworks of spaces, meant to be reiterated in public venues adding their layers of meaning to spaces they are performed in. That would be the defining feature within the vast field of visual arts - the works always concern a space, not just by displaying the work there, but taking the space and everything in it as a part of it, including the guy who ripped
the lid open. Beyond this I see defining what belongs to which niche of art to be irrelevant, naturally the works could fit into various other categories as well.

I understand the topic to be a taboo for most people. My intention - which, like stated before, I already know to be extremely easily ignored and twisted - is not to belittle or to undermine anyone’s grief of the loss of a loved one, but to search and to underline the reasons why that same grief has become such an overwhelming and crippling factor, one that fairly easily could be minimized without dismissing the value of the lives that have ended.

My gifts, albeit somewhat pervasive, have so far mostly created only private instead of public discussion, which most likely will remain in the sphere they will be conducted in - a feature that I am quite happy about because that so far has kept the conversations somewhat meaningful.

What kind of an image of identity was shown through the works?

I can say that the coffin represents the way I want to be perceived. Arriving to that happened intuitively. The process of building it was one of trial and error, more intuitive than a traditional design process based on concept sketches and technical drawings. But as such, in effect based on one paper
model, it was interesting to see how it gradually took its final shape. I wouldn’t call it typical but it isn’t extravagant either - rooted in tradition it has a modern twist.

The more involved I got with the idea of death the more it seemed to be a matter of life. In the sense of religion or beliefs this would be afterlife, from the perspective of identity it is life in retrospective - who we are, what do we believe in and how do we want to convey that.

Did I learn Ars Moriendi? And am I now more at ease with death, or did it help anyone else to be more at ease with death?

The hypothesis, that if we would accept and consciously prepare for the inevitable has had an impact in my life, and so far it has been for the better. Awareness of the history of burials and the possibilities that exist today as well as the work created on the base of that knowledge could be said to have brought me closer to an understanding. But like stated in the beginning being young and lacking what older people would refer to as perspective means that I am not expecting death in any time soon. Now I have a vessel for traveling to the caresses of the earth when that moment comes. And now I definitely can picture myself inside it and because of the experience as well as the documentation
made of the performance I can even imagine what it would look like. And honestly, now it doesn’t seem a daunting image.

If one speaks about conquering the fear for death is another matter. I have been in life threatening situations, being present in the Myyrmanni bombing for example, and that seemed to cause more of a worry towards the life of others than for my own. But sudden events such as that are distinct from dying of old age or a gradually progressing disease. That would be something different; you in a sense see it coming and have time to really dwell on it. So when it comes to learning the art of dying, it can be said that the first steps have been taken, the rest will reveal itself in time - claiming anything else would be a lie.

Each time I started to talk about my plans concerning this project with someone, no matter were they my friends or complete strangers, the conversation seemed to keep on going. A normal reaction that I have been used to in most cases has been the opposite, a nod or an “aha”, apart from the ones who happened to actually be interested in the topic. When speaking of death everyone I talked with had something to say about it, usually about a recent or an exceptional funeral they had attended or about the wishes concerning their own ceremony. The theme is definitely a poke in the eye that gets your attention. It also seems
that is the only thing needed: in general people aren’t afraid of the theme and are surprisingly willing to talk about it.

Being aware and open about not being able to have biological children has been helpful for me and apparently to others as well. It has been another topic that has stimulated a lot of discussion. First of all it seems to be more common than one would think and secondly it is also something that isn’t openly discussed, especially by men. This was one of the reasons that set the whole process of making death-related works in motion nearly two years ago.

Now that this leg of the process is ending, events looming on the horizon allow me to end my writing on a happy note: with thanks to donated sperm, it seems that I am going to become a father in summer. Having children doesn’t make you a father - raising them does. So, in the foreseeable future I need to continue to be open about this issue so that my kid doesn’t have to find out the specifics from my thesis.
8 More?

More images as well as future performance dates can be found on the website www.harripiispanen.eu
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