

Juha Pekka Matias Laakkonen

Selected Works 2008 - 2015

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Within a Hollow Sphere, 2015

Wood, wool, cow's intestines





A tree, left standing from a clear-cut, has fallen. I observe its roots, to figure how it stood. I bore a hole through its trunk from south to north and another one across it, from west to east. I make an infinite loop running through these cardinal holes. I saw a length containing the holes. I drag it away from the rest of the tree and peel it. I turn the log upright. This is *the log below*.

I climb a tree and saw its trunk at two heights near the top. I remove the section between the cuts and peel it. I wrap it in the bark from *the log below*. This is *the log above*.

I return to the fallen tree, bringing *the log above*. I unwrap the bark. I bend it to open to its original girth and lay my head in the gap where the length was taken, facing the sky. I limit my vision: I use the roll of bark as my telescope and trace the celestial bodies onto *the log above*.

In the gallery, *the log below* is used as a stand/support for *the log above*. The two are positioned according to the cardinals. The points marked on the log, corresponding to the stars observed in the forest, are projected onto the gallery walls. The hand-drill that was used to drill through the log is used to mark the constellations on the gallery walls, which become a map of a given moment in time in a forest in Sweden. *Within a Hollow Sphere*.





Visitation Rights, 2015

Pine resin, melted on a fire of dried moose faeces, pressed to shape the top of the highest point of the island of Lille Molla. Spring water.



This work, commissioned for Lofoten International Art Festival 2015, took place on the desolate and mountainous island of Lille Molla in northern Norway.

Before arriving at the scene I sew a garment that was intended to become invaluable during my visits to the island, and also a bag dimensioned to just about hold the folded and rolled garment. Anything I transported to and from the island had to fit into this cylindrical fabric bag, which I was to carry with me at all times .

I spent an amount of time paddling to and around the island, looking for ways to cross its mountains, as some parts appeared outright inaccessible.

When I came ashore I noticed three clearly distinguishable tracks in the wet sand, leading towards the sea. I followed this trail into a swampy valley on the gentle side of the mountains. I found a pile of faeces and a few areas of flattened grass where some being might have rested. I picked up the faeces.

I kept searching the island, tracing its outlines, roaming through its inner parts, moving up its steep cliffs, finding refreshment in its springs.

In the absence of the being that preceded me, I made an effort to erase the digestive impact of its stay and continued to collect the faeces I came across. When I found no more and the faeces I had collected had dried up, I reverted to the shadows of the forest to gather resin from its trees.

Eventually I made my way to the very top of the island. There, with the entire island in sight, I built a fire fuelled by the dried faeces and melted the resin over it. I scooped the ashes of the faeces into the hot fluid resin and mixed the two substances. I poured the cooling solution over the highest point of the island, pressing it so that it took the shape of the summit.

Upon leaving the island for the last time, I pulled seaweed from the surrounding shallow waters and brought it with me. Back on the mainland, I entered a room and attached the slimy seaweed, cord by cord, onto the ceiling, leading them to a point where all the hanging ends could be conjoined. As they dried they became thinner and firmly attached to the ceiling.

I then wove a small flat basket from the seaweed as it was getting dry, and I placed the mould of the mountaintop on it. I suspended it with four cords, attached an additional length of woven seaweed and connected this to the conjoined strands of seaweed clinging to the ceiling. The weight of the mould stretched the seaweed construction and left it standing on the floor.

As the moisture evaporated the seaweed contracted and the following morning it had pulled the mould off the floor, over which it was now gently hovering. I lifted the mould from the basket and placed it on the floor.

Over the next few days, as the structure continued imperceptibly to twist around itself, the fragile seaweed cords retained a memory of the curves of the mould. I filled the mould with spring water from the island and dropped my bag on the floor.

Not once had I taken out the garment.

¹ The work was carried out over a period of four weeks, during which I travelled back and forth between the mainland and the island. I did not sleep on the island. Neither did I bring any supplies for my own maintenance during my stays.



Lille Molla, August 2015



Dodo, 2015

Bird bones washed ashore on an island, collected and ground on its shores and embedded in rosin.



Lamed Vav, 2014

Hand-spun wool yarn crocheted to form a mitten with a separated sheath for forefinger. Whenever cut, continuity was restored with a knot.

Completed and unravelled repeatedly until the yarn fell short of the garment's initial measure, resulting in the eventual form with an open forefinger and thumb.

All the wool that wore off of the yarn, as it dwindled and refined during the 36 times the garment was made, is concealed inside.

Estrapade, 2014

Hand processed wool and wood





I drove to almost exclusively Swedish-speaking Korsnäs, the westernmost municipality in continental Finland. I purchased twelve kilos of raw wool, was handed a wooden mallet and got an aspen felled and cut into a length, safe to be transported on the roof of the car.

I crossed the country to almost exclusively Finnish-speaking Ilomantsi, the easternmost municipality in Finland. I sheared twelve ewes, purchased a wooden wolf head and got an aspen felled and cut in the measurements of the one I was travelling with.

The wood and the wool, the mallet and the head, were transported to Antwerp¹. I followed.

I carded the wool and hand-spun it with the wooden mallet as a spindle. I was preparing the weft for a weave. I pressed the stool – that loosened off of the unwashed wool – into a single cube. I ripped the logs in half lengthwise, and one of each half further in two.

I now had the wood in six equally long pieces, two halves and four quarters. I placed the pieces upright leaning against the wall and spun the hand-spun yarn around them, measuring the yarn to the volume of the wood. I travelled back to Finland.

I repeated the journey between the two municipalities, this time on a bicycle in east to west direction. I received a modest amount of wool during my ride. I collected a body of water combined of small portions from rivers and lakes I passed. I picked lupines growing along the way.

I returned to Antwerp. I released the wood from the wool's embrace. I hand-spun the additional wool, that I brought from my second crossing, to be the warp of the weave.

I arranged the wood lengths on the floor as a frame divided in two. I stretched the newly spun warp yarn between the opposite ends of the other half of the frame, for the eventual weave to measure the length of the wood.

I finished the weave, separated it from the frame and reassembled the wood on the floor in line with two vague stripes on the wall. The stripes had been drawn off my shirt by my shoulder and hip while spinning around the standing pieces of wood.

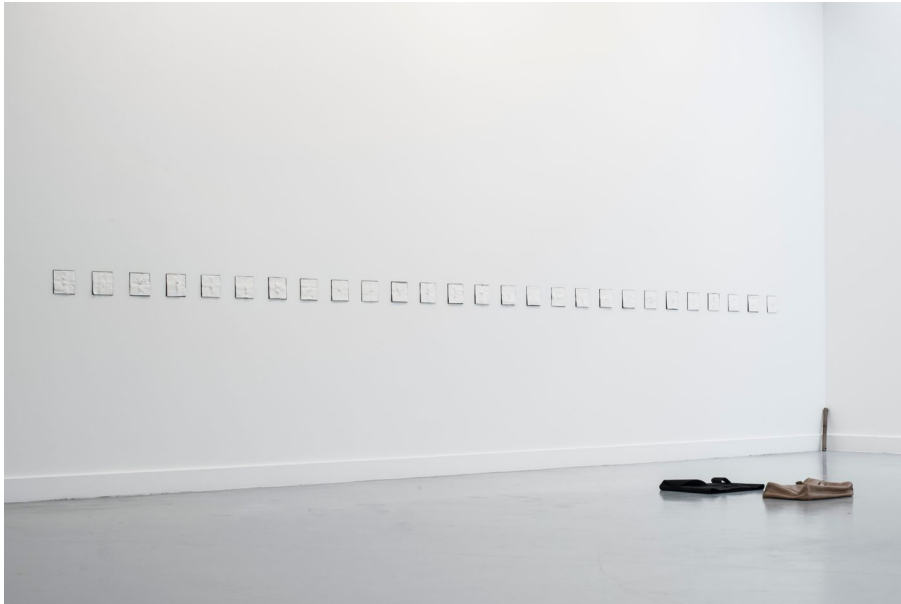
I laid the four quarter-pieces between the two halves and covered them in the finished garment.

I applied the united water-body to the woven garment. I dressed in the garment and spun the yarn left over, engulfing the mallet.

I will carve a head – with a blowhole running through it – out from both of the halved beams.

The weave will be put in motion in its geographical context, the land between the two extreme source points. The warp sites will be located on the final crossing on foot descending to the direct communion with the land. To know where to rest and what to circle, I will walk in the garment.

¹ The work was made possible by the support of M HKA and Air Antwerpen.



Tsimtsum, 2014

Handsewn leather case, maple stick, felt and cotton paper

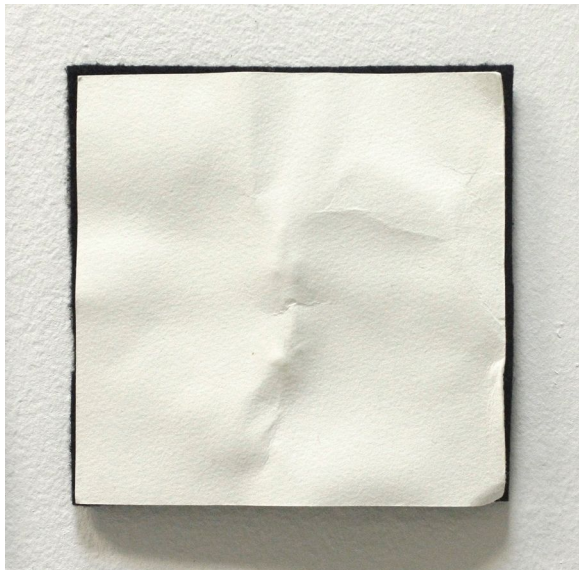
A 'travel piece' where all the constituent parts (the hand-made leather case, its wooden handle, the felt and paper wrappings) are put on display, except the objects that have left their imprints on them when I sat on the stuffed case as I journeyed to the exhibition. The title refers to the kabbalistic notion of reduction or presence-in-absence.

I sew a case from leather. The case closes with a zipper and its interior is divided in two. On one side I pack my basic belongings that I will need on the trip to the location where I am to exhibit.

I make portions of a chosen material, place them on pieces of paper between matching pieces of felt. These small units are organized and wrapped in two larger pieces of felt, making a loose package. None of the parts are fastened, making the package very vulnerable to movement. This package is the content of the other half of the case.

I travel by land (and water). I travel seated on top of the case. On one side of the case are two straps from which I carry the case with a maple stick as a removable handle. The handle is removable in order to carry the case and be seated on it without changing its position in relation to gravity. While seated, the chosen materials press against the papers under the pressure of my personal belongings and the weight of my body.

I exhibit the papers together with the felt, case and the handle. The material, the content behind the impressions on the papers is not revealed nor are my personal belongings.





The Great Sealer and Berries of the City, 2012

Granite boulder, crocheted pillow, paper and local berries

This work played out in a small independent exhibition space (two rooms in a pre-war villa) in Vilnius, Lithuania, during a two-month residency. The configuration of the work itself took three weeks to accomplish.

First, a boulder was moved from the woods to the house. A round pillow was sewn and stuffed with buckwheat. A pillow case was crocheted for it, from yellow yarn. Two drawings of this pillow were begun. Berries were found around the city.

The work began with a private view. At this point, the boulder was standing in the front room facing the central wall opposite the entrance to the house. The pillow hung on the wall above it and one sheet of paper hung on each of the lateral walls. Both sheets had a semi-circle on it, traced in pencil.

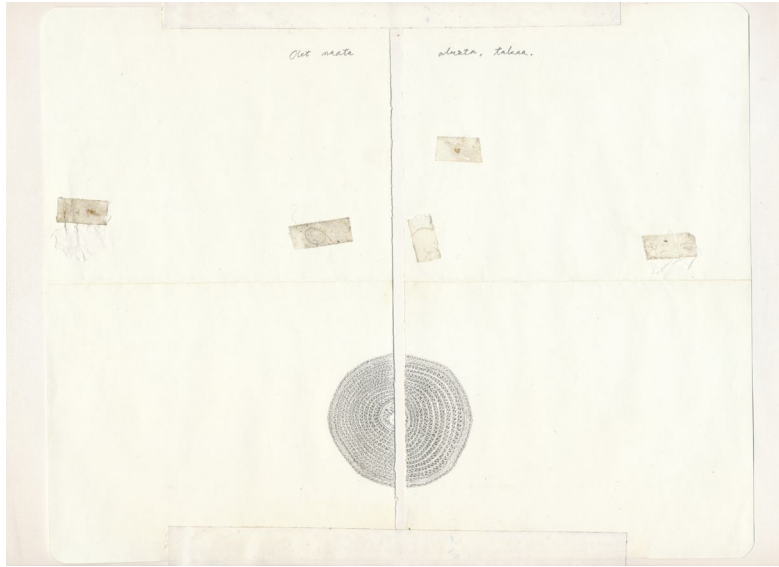
The door to the inner room was fixed to be slightly ajar. The colour of the room could be sensed through this crack, as well as from outside, through the garden window. Its walls were painted a dark blue, the colour of the Mother of God in Orthodox iconography.

After this beginning, the project continued. The drawings were finished little by little, as individual images but also as the halves of one whole. Berries were picked from trees and bushes that anyone might find while strolling through the city.

At the end of each day in this phase of the work the freshly picked berries were deposited in the inner room. They were poured onto the floor and left there to dry or rot.

The pillow was taken down from the wall and put onto the floor. The boulder was placed on top of it. Whenever someone left the house, the boulder was given a slight push, and in this way it gradually left its initial position inside the house. The pillow was to keep the boulder from directly touching the floor while it was eased towards the outdoors.

When the drawings were finished, they were detached from the lateral walls and brought together to form a circle on the central wall, where the pillow first hung. Eventually the boulder left the house, but the pillow remained inside, stopped by the threshold.



Then it was time to enter the inner room, clean the fading berries, remove any leaves or twigs and make sure no individual berry was lying on top of any other berry. The berries were pushed together to form a surface. The door to the inner room was left open so that the air-borne flavour of the berries – the true content of this room – might spread.

Finally, when the house was revisited after the closing ceremony for the work, the berries were gathered and brought to the place in the woods where the boulder was found, to fill the depression it left when it was taken out of the ground.





Creaking, Cracking, 2012

Rawhide, thread, amadou, tallow and ashes

A place-specific tool, this object was made to be used only on the Curonian Spit, a narrow isthmus on the Baltic Sea coast shared by Lithuania and Russia's Kaliningrad Province, known for its massive sand dunes.

The dunes were the result of deforestation. Villages were buried in sand many times; homes had to be constantly moved. Reforestation was begun in the 19th century, to stop the dunes from migrating and allow homes to stay put. Today this landscape has been almost entirely taken over by trees. Tourism has replaced fishing as the locals' main source of income.

The whip is meant to be an acoustic experience. It is made of rawhide, which becomes hard when it dries. To remain functional, it must be consistently oiled and kept flexible by constant use. Because such hide is basically raw meat, the whip may also function as portable nourishment, if its user is lost in the forest.

The whip emulates a traditional stock whip, which is designed to create a 'sonic boom' when its head, the 'cracker', moves through the air faster than the speed of sound. The cracker in fact breaks the sound barrier. A stock whip does not work through direct physical impact on the livestock to be herded; it communicates with them through sound.

I carved out a slice of amadou from a tree fungus commonly known as tinder fungus. I attached the slice to my whip's 'cracker'. These are the 'instructions' for the piece:

"Stroll the woods and listen (to the trees). Every time you notice a tree creaking, crack the whip towards a tree that stands silently besides the one that creaks. A crack for a creak, for each of the surrounding silent trees. Every time the cracker head falls off, replace it with a new piece of fungus. Keep looking out for these fungi in the woods as you walk."

The cracking of the whip urges the man-made forest to ponder its destiny, and fall back into the wilderness.





Four Days Heading to Easter, 2012

Angora yarn and alms

This is a performance that lasted for four days. It took place during opening hours at the Culture Communication Centre in Klaipėda, Lithuania.

Each day I kneeled at the same spot in the lobby on my jacket, folded into a cushion and put on the floor. In this position I also silently begged for money, to be thrown into the object I was making from white angora yarn.

At the beginning of each day I crocheted a new object on top of the one from the day before, thus sealing in the previous day's alms. Towards the end of the fourth day I sealed the last day's yield by reversing the object's form. I then crocheted three straps to join in a loop so that the object could be suspended from my hand.

I got up and walked through the space of the Culture Communication Centre, approached all the artworks exhibited there and swinging the object – reminiscent of an incense burner but also a receptacle for alms with an audible content – in front each of them.





Entrance, 2011

Doormat crocheted from a length of hemp rope measuring the way home

I measured the way from the entrance of the gallery to the entrance of my home. I crocheted a doormat with a hemp rope measuring the distance. The doormat is placed in the gallery space by the entrance. The rest of the space is empty. The length of the rope is not told.

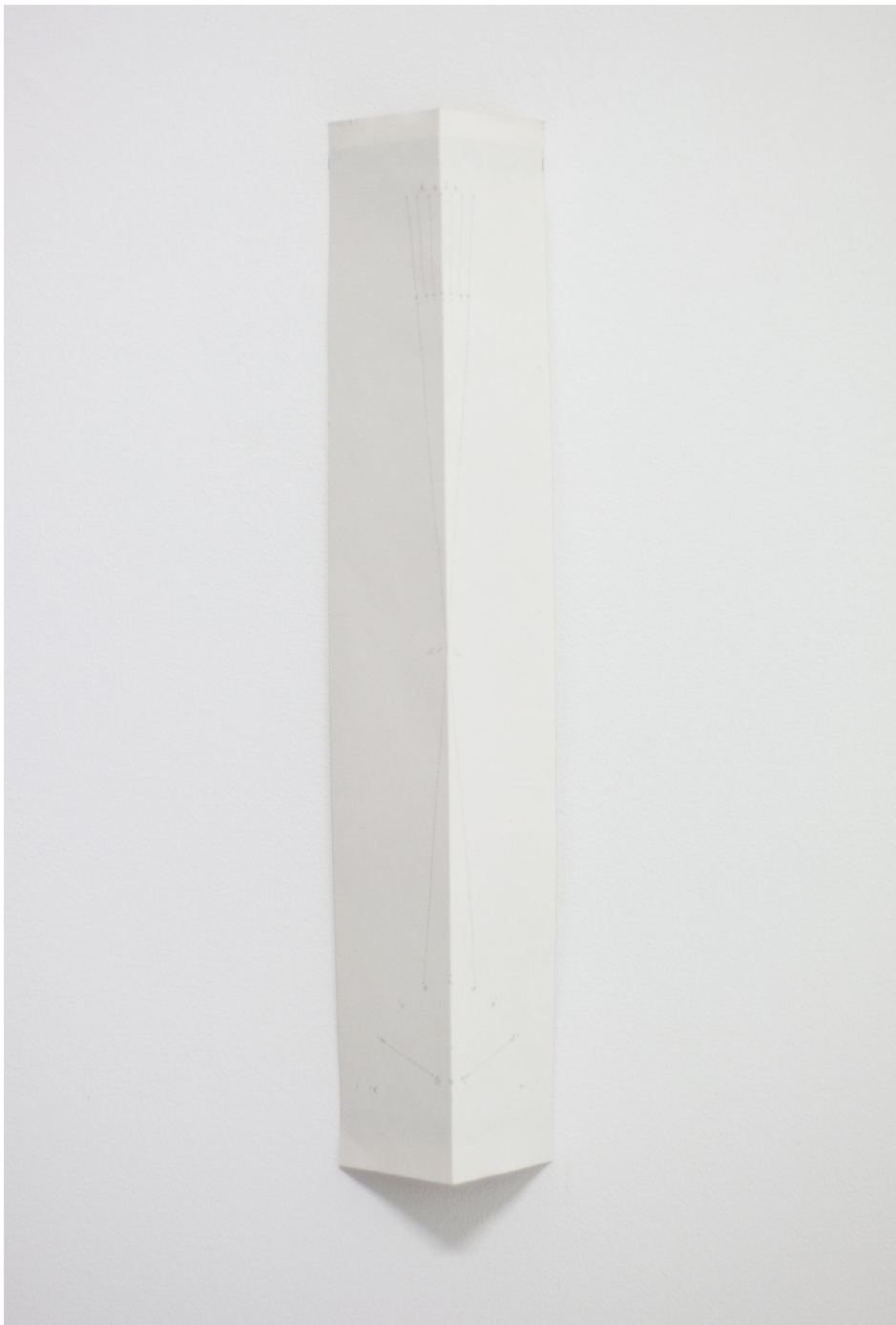




Kastepiste, 2011

A flower, pencil on paper on wood, copies of hand written text, powdered convallaria majalis root, rain costume and lights





The community is located at the northern corner of the island, lying. For the Plant living means lying. The Wind holds sway; light points out a few details of the forest on the other shore, illuminated as far as one can see. For the Plant moments lose their meaning. I keep still until the movement that brought me to this spot is drained from my mind. The Mentor sways but retains its posture. When I am not covering the clouds, we lay facing them. One moves; both recede. It seems as if the stone rock is too large to remain under water, once the surface gives in. Muteness is sleep. The sound-environment signals wakefulness, although sleep rules. My own rain is becoming weaker. The Mentor bows together with the growing factor and opens up. Eventually, the division takes place and we sink. Self is slakity; falling is in the elements. I am born into imperfect knowledge and therefore stay quiet in my mentor's presence. The Wind brings the Mentor to the north to proclaim stability. The Mentor stretches its leaves down towards the shore. I unite the horizontal and vertical joint. All is eventually sealed in privacy. Dizziness by a bottomless lake. Need appears to be the index of the individual. The course of events is self-evident. A geo-thermal heat. Geometry is to be observed: too far or too near. I see the sun and the moon. The Mentor knows how they feel. The blue eye of the depth surrounds a glowing black stain. I see it flap. Collapsed into liquid while underwater light formulates a thought into a line that is a dot: O. How high we would be if it were not for the lake surrounding us! The brimstone retreats to the side that the Wind left behind, acknowledging our noble salivada. Enough rain; we were already drowned. I learn the flight path of the sun as long as the earth remains still. The air moves as such; a field arises from the lake. It is time to take a dip. Approximately a hundred and sixty steps to go around the island. Ants come in three different sizes or categories. They descend from the trees. I am an imprint that yields. The Mentor hails the Water. The Wind explains to the lake what to anticipate and how to behave. I see. A seagull settles down on the Water. Morning burns a mark on my nose. A direct shadow is cast over death. I use my hands. The Escalated Wind makes a tree take steps while standing still. Just is in time. The Mentor lies in its own company; the Wind shifts. I sit in the root-crack of a tree. I hear Water being the only magic. The root is in doubt. The Wind's knowledge persists. I lift a stone and hovers from below appear, celebrating the summer. Sight and sense run through the family. Two divide into their facets. No one is to remember. Clouds above shadow pillars. I lay the mentor at rest. The Mentor ascends. It is individuals right to grow a root system, while in the face of eternity civilising is the only exponent. One was sent to greet an echo but ended up building a city. That which is not revalued contains similarities in green, blue and yellow. Hay lashes Water, slithering to the rhythm of the hand.

I come ashore a small inland island. The Lilies of the Valley have not yet blossomed. I lift one up with its roots, separating it from the communal bond, the shared root system. I drift ahead to a smaller neighbouring island and plant the flower in the soil. The flower shall be my mentor. I will serve my mentor and wait for my mentor's resurgence.

In the rain I bend over in a continuation of the earth between my mentor and heaven, so that my mentor and my mentor's place of slumber remains untouched by rain. I store rainwater for my own needs and commit to a rainwater fast so as to strip myself of myself, of my stock of waste. I urinate, watering my mentor and my mentors place of slumber until the day my mentor bursts into full glory. I spend the days focusing on my mentor's example. I act only on my mentor's urgings. I write down my mentors teachings.

On the day of resurrection, the day my mentor blossoms, I lift my mentor from the soil and press my mentor in my mentor's celestial ceremonial dress. Then we return to civilization.

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Kastepiste means 'dew point' in Finnish. Kaste stands for dew, but also for baptism. The word therefore translates alternatively as a 'point of baptism'. Dew point is the temperature at which the air causes water vapour to condense and form water droplets, fog or clouds.

If the human body is regarded as atmosphere, dew point equals the system with its temperature. The corresponding state of condensation in a body is constant; an involuntary process, but somewhat connected to the activity the body engages in.

Given water returns to the giver reformed. Voluntary breath control among mammals living in water is said to be the foundation of speech, which makes humans aquatic by nature. When one's core temperature sinks while one remains

in the rain, in temperatures well below that of one's own (core) temperature and in a state of no nutrition intake apart from the rain, the systematic urine production remains constant.

The result of reaching a further calculated point is an understanding of such point. A magnificent change is required. When one anticipates a particular result actively, by specifying a situation, one's mode of adjustment becomes clear.

An ascendant is a rising sign appearing at a certain time in a certain location, in control. The dew point is always set at a lower value than the present air temperature. If the temperature does not drop, no condensation occurs and the particles remain independent, hidden in their dance of distance. When change does not happen, the measuring point is a document of the conditional potency.

Birds, and all existing matter, are seen to define partnership. We become paired. The fundament for this is the revelation of condensation. The explanation changes in accordance to the adjustment. Expectation forms an attitude. In a pair the counterpart embodies the dominance of intensified sensing by bearing with the other's activity. Circumstances are borne in small portions, which rely on their independence from the habitat. A situation is maintained and the situation becomes the maintainer of the will to maintain. This situation is bilingual, and to remain aware of duality is to learn from the event.

Devotion reveals involuntary aspects of any situation. In order to foresee at what point anything takes place one must be willing to change. When Christ is baptised, the water used becomes sacred. This water is holy and pure as a result of being directed unto the One who is to redeem the other.





## Latva, 2010

*In Finnish, latva means 'tree top'.*

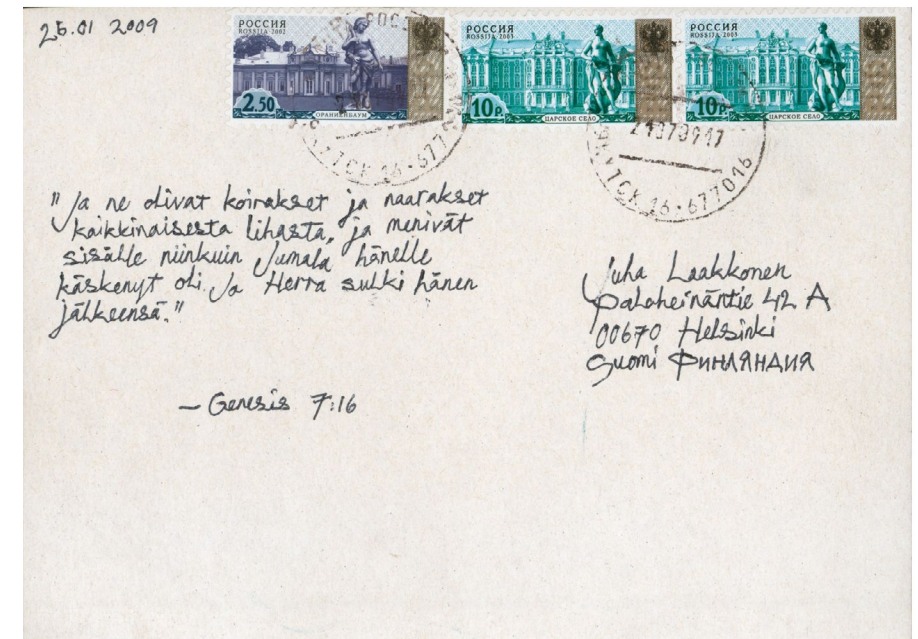
I grafted a tree on top of another tree and left it to grow in this place. There is a hill overseeing the forest where the tree is situated. In time, one will be able to notice the rejuvenated top rising above the even sea of tree tops.



## Walking from Yakutsk to Helsinki in 5.3 Million Steps, 2009

*Handmade reindeer hide boots and a postcard*

For this work I spent 176 days walking in and around the city of Yakutsk in eastern Siberia. This is also the number of verses in Genesis from the Creation to the Great Flood. The number of steps given in the title would have taken me all the way back to my native Helsinki, but it also referred to the size of Finland's population. Throughout the entire performance, in temperatures varying from  $-50^{\circ}$  to  $+40^{\circ}$ , I wore the same pair of reindeer hide boots, which I had made for myself and which wore out in the process.





*And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the lord shut him in. –Genesis 7:16*

This is the last verse in the Bible describing life on Earth before the Great Flood. As water covers the land, Noah's journey begins. Where it will end depends on the weather, not on mankind (although people had to decide to stay alive long enough to cover the time gap).

From everything that lives of the land, a few are chosen to be isolated, to suffer a time of incertitude, waiting for the land to reappear. All is lost, all will be preserved. Everything on land is brought in pairs, selected as representatives of their own kind.

I translated the bible verses, into days by counting the verses from the beginning of Creation to the Great Flood. This gave me 176 days.

During the Second World War, Finnish people were deported to Siberia. 5.3 million people live in Finland today. The city of Yakutsk, capital of the Republic of Sakha or Yakutia in eastern Russia, is 5,004 kilometres away from Helsinki. I calculated that I would have to take 5.3 million steps to walk this distance.

The day I arrived in Yakutsk I wrote a postcard to myself in Helsinki with the Bible verse and the date. I made all my 5.3 million steps in Yakutsk. That took 176 days. The day I left Yakutsk I mailed the postcard.

Prior to my departure I made myself a pair of winter boots from reindeer hide. These were the boots I was going to wear as I walked the entire distance from

Yakutsk to Helsinki. I got a bit worried that the boots weren't warm enough, as I spotted some tiny holes in the leather.

I knew Yakutia would be cold, but I had no way of knowing how cold it would feel. I had decided to prepare only for winter conditions, since I would arrive in January. Yet I knew the transition from winter to summer would be harsh for the material. Indeed the boots were sometimes too warm even in winter. During my stay, daytime temperatures ranged from -50 to 40 centigrades.

Maintenance rules for the boots: All repair work must be done from inside. The fur will be gradually shaved off as temperatures rise. Under no circumstances will the boots be replaced with another pair.

As time passed the snow melted, the ice broke and the boots wore out. I did my best to adjust to the changing natural environment. I was left with fewer directions to walk in as winter roads on ice vanished and the flooded Lena river reached the borders of the city.

Every little change I made was reflected on my feet. About half way through my 5.3 million steps I put the left boot on my right foot, and the right boot on my left foot, stopped eating meat, and continued walking like this. When summer arrived, with the heat and the dust, the boots were no longer recognisable.

I finished collecting steps on the 176th day, as I walked up to the aeroplane back to Helsinki, took my seat, changed into ordinary shoes.

25 January – 19 July 2009



## Personal Confidentiality Protection, 2008

*Handsewn garment second-hand gun powder bag fabric  
approximately 370 x 390 cm*

Personal confidentiality protection is made of custom-made cloth<sup>1</sup>, the height, head circumference and the added length by the shoulders on both sides. When one dresses up right in the garment in question, i.e. when placing one's head in the cup one has made for the dimensions of the head, the garment drapes around oneself only just reaching the ground, the cloth thus enshrouding one completely within it, enclosing one in its environment away from visual connections, leaving one exposed to external threats. In the corners of the rectangle, extending to the sides on the ground, beackets are made, thus making it possible to nail oneself to the spot.

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<sup>1</sup> Hand-sewn gunpowder bag fabric.

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