

Frank Brummel

### **1. Stone text plates / fictional archaeological artifacts.**

In these works I utilize the historical usage of stone-text-plates and seek to develop a contribution to the contemporary art discourse by carving texts, words and imagery in stone. Stone-text-plates have been used for thousands of years across cultures and geographies. I apply a critical archaeological point of view on stone-text-plates, that considers aspects of evanescence, fragmentariness and the awareness, that there is no claim of completeness.

Historically the content of stone-text-plates was often based on educational aims, like demonstration of power, informing the illiterates or dissemination of information in general, made for good or ill. I apply an imagined indefinite future archaeological point of view on our society. The artifacts I produce therefor would somehow never exist in this way, as with very few exceptions, we today hardly see the need in communicating information on stone. It is an imaginary story that I make up, as part of my concept and with which I intend to explore how words, texts and images carved onto stone develop meanings and narratives for us about us today.

In a time in which the lifespan of daily messages is very short I work with messages in stone, the often considered “eternal”. I am not especially fond of the word eternal in this context, but I must admit, that it does help supporting my concept, as it historically brings in aspects of importance and insignificance and carries therefor awareness of decision-making structures and its reasoning. By working with the material stone in a slow technique I try to open a window, by decelerating, to a more conscious present moment.



Smoking AA Batteries and The Clown Is Good. More works on: [www.frankbrummel.com](http://www.frankbrummel.com)

## 2. Stones as Active Agents

In this work I focus on stones, as in stone-built-heritage, as a record carrier for historical environmental impact, similar to proxy archive. I question how to re-think therefor inscription in stone and how to re-find in a way another archival status as visual media in regards of readability of the various layers of inscriptions in stone?

The illusion of archiving information in an assumingly eternal material by carving, could therefore be grounded by an understanding of value of another whilst unintended but evidential readability in something like contamination or the decay of the exact same material, reflecting on the weathering processes of stone under increased environmental pressures and climate change.

This work shown as part of Helsinki Biennale 2023 was done in collaborate with experts, including researcher and conservator Elisa Heikkilä from the Finnish Heritage Agency, Christoph Beier, head of the research program of Geology and Geophysics at the Department of Geosciences and Geography of the University of Helsinki, and Katrin Wilhelm, a researcher at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford.



Exhibition view, As You May Sense, Helsinki Biennial 2023





Red Green Blue Dazzling Light Born Deep So Far So Long Being Archive Digging  
Drilling Prism Spectrum Memory

With a ceramic in glass-print of a thins-section showing the structure minerals of the stones giving possibility to compare in future compositional changes in the structure of the stone.





Part of the installation with an engraved head with applied leaf gold.

## Stones as Active Agents

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In *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media*, Shannon Mattern makes a compelling case that smart urban areas are not a contemporary exception, but instead, cities have long been built to provide and record intelligence—for thousands of years. One example she cites is those of the rock inscriptions from Longyin Cave in Guilin, China, and the words of Robert E. Harist, who argues that it's important to consider the millennia-old engraved texts as "environmental case studies" that are not only "integral parts of their landscape settings" but also "mixed genealogies of inscription, landscape."<sup>1</sup>

This work is drawn to the possibilities of stones as record carriers for historical environmental impact<sup>2</sup> and examines stone-built heritage and structures in Helsinki as proxy archives. Bringing Shannon's work together with my own, I also draw upon Dietmar Offenhuber's

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Image 1. An index of stone-built building and sculpture pedestals as proxy archives and record carriers for historical environmental impacts in Helsinki. Material information from top left to bottom right: the Helsingin päärautatieasema (Helsinki Central Train Station), designed by architect Eliel Saarinen, is comprised of Hangon graniitti (Hanko granite) and was built in 1904, with the stone works completed between 1914 and 1916; the Alois Kivi patsas (Alois Kivi statue), designed and sculpted by Wilho Kallio, is on a pedestal comprised of Vehmaa rapakivigraniitti granite (Balmoral Red) and was raised in 1989; the Nordean pääkonttori (Nordea head office, previously that of Suomen Yhtyspankki), designed by architect Ole Gripenberg, was built in 1936 and comprised of Vehmaa rapakivigraniitti granite (Balmoral Red); and from the Vehmaa Uhlu louhimo quarry, the equine statue of Marshal Mannerheim, designed and sculpted by Aimo Takkanen, is on a pedestal comprised of Vehmaa granite (Balmoral Red) and was raised in 1960; and the Tempo house, designed by architect Risto Siikgström, is comprised of Vehmaa granite and Taivassalo granite (Balmoral Red) and was built in 1978. Photographs courtesy of the author, Frank Brummel.

<sup>1</sup> Shannon Mattern, *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 92.

<sup>2</sup> This work was developed between 2022 and 2023 in the framework of a year-long collaborative research studio (K-JI-11-22A: Ecological Thinking) at Uniarts Helsinki together with Aarhus University (Research Pavilion 2023 and Helsinki Biennial 2023). For more detail on the course's motivations to engage with the themes of environmental data, sensing and contamination, please see the course blog at: <https://bloggt.uniarts.fi/en/blog/ecological-thinking/#about>.





concept of autographic visualization<sup>3</sup> to create "environmental case stud[ies]," making them an integral part of life here, allowing other ways of readability.

In this work, I ask how to develop an artistic method that would bring both stones and stone-built heritage out of the passive role of witness and into the active role of an agent. How can we encounter and understand other unknown ways of readability and acknowledge the authenticity of stones, one that exists beyond human comprehension? Is there a mode of authenticity that recognizes the more-than-human agency of the stone and its collaborators like the wind and the rain and time? Can we see stones as being alive?

Building materials in Helsinki, including granite and other plutonites, are more resistant to environmental pollution than other materials like sandstones and limestones. While patterns of damage in Helsinki's stone structures may not be readily noticeable, other parts of the world have visibly damaged stone structures due to weathering processes under increased environmental pressures and climate change. Drawing upon the experience of my former profession as a stonemason in restoration and conservation, I explore the impact of environmental pollution and climate change on stone-built heritage in Helsinki; my work questions whether the seemingly intact stone-built environment in Helsinki may also be

3 Dietmar Offenhuber, "Data by Proxy—Material Traces as Autographic Visualizations," *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics* 35, no. 1 (2019): 98–108.

contaminated.<sup>4</sup> For this, I reached out to collaborate with experts, including researcher and conservator Elisa Heikkilä from the Finnish Heritage Agency, Christoph Beier, head of the research program of Geology and Geophysics at the Department of Geosciences and Geography of the University of Helsinki, and Katrin Wilhelm, a researcher at the School of Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford.<sup>4</sup>

But finding the building dates and materials of buildings was very challenging until I was directed to a small booklet by the former director of the geological museum, Martti Lehtinen: *Helsingin Kaupunkikiivopas* (Helsinki City Stone Guide). Based on this booklet I made a small but exemplary set of buildings and public sculptures.<sup>5</sup> Built between 1914 and 1978 (Image 1), they can act as a reliable base for samples, as the building material used is from the same group of stones, and the precise year of construction is included.

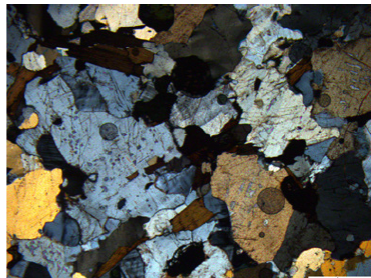


Image 2. A scanned image of thin section from the migmatite *Mäntylampi pumalinen* in cross polarised transmitted light. Image courtesy of the author, Frank Brümmer, and produced under the guidance of doctoral researcher Nikolaos Karampelas at the Department of Geosciences and Geography at the University of Helsinki.

4 Books and articles the blog-text refers to include Brian Dillon's *Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press / Whitechapel Gallery 2011), 25; Doris Reikman's lecture entitled "Saurer Regen: Entstehung, Auswirkungen, Gegenmaßnahmen" (Acid Rain: Formation, Effects, Countermeasures), accessed December 1, 2022, [http://daten.fhkt.bchensie.uni-bayreuth.de/umst/saurer\\_regen/archiv/saurer\\_regen.htm](http://daten.fhkt.bchensie.uni-bayreuth.de/umst/saurer_regen/archiv/saurer_regen.htm); Susan Schupp's *Material Witness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 3; Katrin Wilhelm et al., "Stone-Built Heritage as a Proxy Archive for Long-Term Historical Air Quality: A Study of Weathering Crusts on Three Generations of Stone Sculptures on Broad Street, Oxford," *Science of The Total Environment* 759 (10 March 2021): 14896, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.148916>; Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris On Ruins and Rainwater* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); and Jussi Parkkinen on Roger Calloin's *Writing of Stones*, *Electronic Mediations*, Volume 46, and *Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 62.

5 Amongst other important information shared by Katrin, the title refers to a particular discussion in which Katrin mentioned the term "stones as active agents."

6 For more, please see: Martti Lehtinen and Jukka I. Lehtinen, *Helsingin Kaupunkikiivopas* (Tekijät: ja Affecto Finland Oy, Karttasekus, 2008).

Screenshots from parts of a text that I wrote for the book *Environment, Data, Contamination*. A publication, part of the exhibition.. Full text can be found here:

PDF: <https://taju.uniarts.fi/handle/10024/7846>

### **3. Engravings (in stone, in landscape, in humans, in time)**

How to Belong? -together

After listening to a presentation of artist Matti Aikio my focus of interest felt on the description of a timeframe as a measure of something that brings a right with it to be somewhere or having a right to occupy an area, living there, claiming it.

Here with the history of Sámi, one sentence somehow strongly popped out for me. Namely the one telling how long the Sámi, already live in the area and I am interested what this argument actually contents and tells. And whether this argument is supportive or something hindering in the discussion.

My family on mother's side are so called Carpathian Germans, a German ethnic group with its own identity, culture, and dialect, who historically lived in what is now Slovakia. In the 12th century, they were invited to settle in the region due to their skills and qualifications, particularly in trade and craftsmanship. Over the centuries, they maintained their language and culture despite living as minorities in areas with different native languages.

However, following World War II, they were forcibly expelled from Slovakia and other regions they inhabited (there is other similar groups who have been living in other places like in Romania, Poland, Ukraine etc.). This resulted in them losing their belongings, homes, often leaving with just a suitcase. While today Slovakia acknowledges the injustice done to these Carpathian Germans, some (questionable) Germans use this 800-year history in the region to justify claims to their former properties, contrasting with the 80 years that others have lived there since their expulsion.

I am interested on the broader context of nationalism and territorial claims. Reflecting on the complexities of historical injustices and the difficulties in reconciling past grievances with present realities. And especially what rights people derive from it for themselves.

The place I live with my family today is a former farm near the City of Turku. Two families live there and share the place. It is a several hundreds of years old farm with old wooden buildings, some of them in very bad condition. Always when our resources allow it we constantly have been restoring these buildings with a lot of own workforce under guidance of the Finnish heritage agency. Caring of these buildings connects me in a way with the place, or at least as good as my own foreign background allows me. But at least seeing the work and therefore time brought into the place seems to do that. Though we are only moved there 8 years ago, our neighbours next to us, have been living there for 13 generations. I am flabbergasted about this fact.

When do people at places coalesce with the area, becoming an entity, an organism itself, like the mycelium of mushrooms in the forest, connecting various elements and transmit between them? With trees, rivers and mountains and even stones becoming relatives? And when does a kind of occupation take part that tries to overrule the area and implements power within the



intend to expand presence? And in what ways stone engravings and stone-builts have been playing a part in this, in so many cultures world-wide?

I like to look at these questions as looking onto layers in stone. The different layers, sediments have different thickness and describe therefor what has been happening then. All together they create the whole. I think of tectonics, stone-plates, shaped like an area looked at from the top describing borders of ground, of a place like the one we life now on. And what do engravings mean on such a stone plate, a metaphor of a description of a timeframe of being at a certain place? Either living with it or trying to dominate it?



*From Cup-marked stones to an Attempt of Home* is a sculptural installation that brings forward the relation of humans and place and what belonging means in this relation.

With a focus on how the place, the landscape engraves/imprints into the person and how the humans engrave themselves into the landscape.

The work was shown while the Ecological thinking symposium in May 2024 at the Museum of Impossible Forms in Helsinki.







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