

Title of research project

# Insects among us

*Entomological encounters, metamorphoses and the impact of power*

Proposal by

**Tuula Närhinen** (DFA, visual artist) and **Tuija Kokkonen** (DA, artist-researcher)



## Abstract

***Insects among us*** targets politics of visibility. We acknowledge the radical other by exposing our eyes and ears to insects. Exhibiting the condition of the insects both physically and metaphorically, we ask how power relations are reflected and reinforced in our emotionally embodied and socially constructed lifeworld. What kind of instruments/media enable us to approach the tiny and often annoying creatures? In which conditions are their voices allowed to be heard? How to interpret the insect metaphor in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*? When a human being is regarded as a bug and starts to feel like one, what are the prerequisites and the consequences of the dehumanization that the turning into an insect entails?

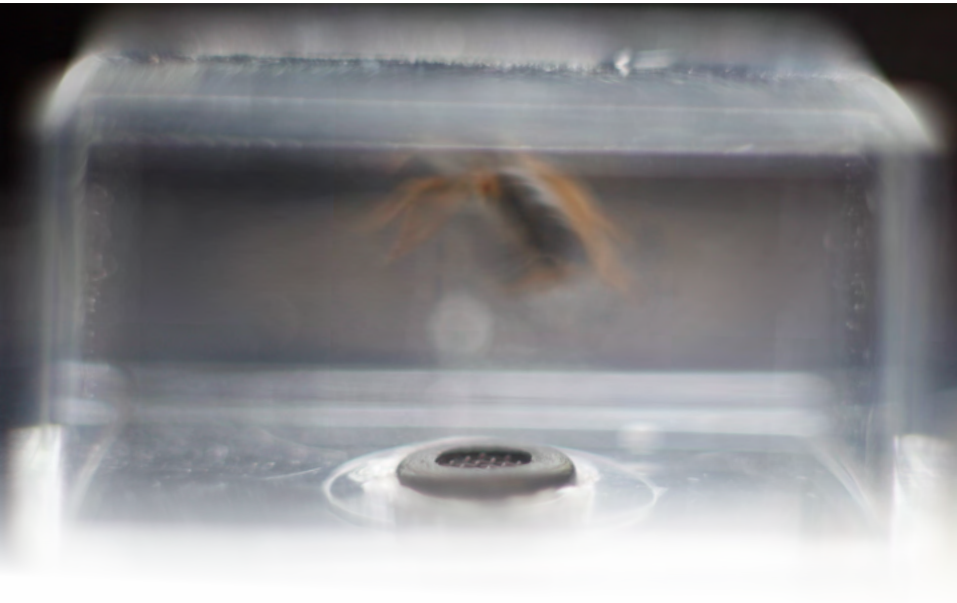
**Närhinen** approaches the question of visibility through art works that bring out the scale and scope of insects and exhibit the materiality of their fragile existence. Her research relies on the work of two Nordic entomologists: the Swede René Malaise (1892–1978) and the Finn Olavi Sotavalta (1918–1991) who both devised ingenious methods for collecting and identifying flying species previously unknown to science. Focusing on the physical conditions of observation Närhinen endeavours to show experientially, how human rationality is connected to the processes of perception and aesthetic meaning-making. Närhinen's project studies the dynamics between the observer and the observed and addresses the subjective role of the researcher. Her inquiry considers the scientist's insights, personal history and cognitive capacities highlighting aspects of interaction and participation in the making of natural history.

**Kokkonen** takes as her point of departure the question of power impact in the neoliberal governance relations and Franz Kafka's short story "*Metamorphosis*" (*Die Verwandlung*, 1916). In Kafka's story a man wakes up one morning finding out that he has turned into an insect, and also all the others perceive him as such. Through the faculties of imagination and empathy Kokkonen's research addresses the severe threat that governance power relations and impacts present to human existence. Drawing from Kafka's text where insects serve as a metaphorical/mental tool for dehumanization, Kokkonen focuses on processes of disregard and alienation in our everyday life. She aims to initiate a critical discussion on the relations between the concepts of metamorphosis (Kafka), practices of governance (Michel Foucault) and mental and social ecology (Felix Guattari, *Three Ecologies* 2000).

## Names of the applicants and description of the team

**Tuula Närhinen** (DFA) is a visual artist and visiting researcher affiliated to the Academy of Fine Arts, UNIARTS Helsinki. Her practice is characterized by comprehensive research projects, which she accomplishes with great determination and professional skill. The subject matter of her art works touches upon controversial issues such as plastic pollution, climate or the question of the animal. Närhinen's practice is rooted in fieldwork and hands-on observation. Re-adapting instruments derived from natural science, she constructs interfaces which enable the audience to move beyond the explicit and to grasp the unfurling of a word invisible to the naked eye/ear. The works emanate in inscribing/registering procedures and result in installations which showcase the methods and the devices implemented. Informed by the disciplines of science studies, the history of natural philosophy and the theory contemporary art, her research compares and draws parallels between the instrumental practices of natural science and visual art, with an emphasis on optical technologies. Her critical voice both challenges and increases understanding of the human condition adding to the knowledge of our environment. In the context of contemporary art, Närhinen's artistic practice acquires new meanings and significance to the socially and culturally coded history of human gaze.

**Tuija Kokkonen** (DA) is an artist, a researcher and a teacher. Since 1996 she has worked on a series of site-specific 'memo performances', as the director of Maus&Orlovski performance collective. The memos are explorations on relationships between performance, "nature", non-human and time, and on the role of performance/art at the age of ecological crises. Her doctoral research project at the Theatre Academy Helsinki, *Esityksen mahdollinen luonto* ("The Potential Nature of Performance – The relationship to the non-human in the performance event from the perspective of duration and potentiality", Acta Scenica 2017) incorporates a performance series entitled *Memos of Time* — performances with and for non-humans (2006–). She has presented her performances as well as published articles widely in Finland and internationally. Her upcoming monograph *Performance in the Age of Ecological Crises* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan (Performance Philosophy series) in 2019.



## Background, methods and objectives of research

We believe that artistic research proceeds in two conceptually interconnected and parallel ways: through works of art and reflective writing. Autonomous art works are at the core of the research. The emphasis of our research is on artistic practice that results in a gallery exhibition and performances. The discursive elements of the study (see below) include a documentation of the works and they are communicated through papers/expositions informed by the practice.

Our proposal consists of a physical exhibition (with art works by Närhinen and Kokkonen) and a research compendium (papers/expositions by Närhinen and Kokkonen) published printed or online. In addition, we would be interested in arranging an exclusive presentation in close connection to the exhibition (for details, see below).

The actuality of our proposal relies on the fact that the number of insects is drastically decreasing. Insects are vanishing. Entomologists call it the windshield phenomenon. In a growing number of studies scientists have tracked alarming declines in domesticated honey bees, monarch butterflies, and lightning bugs. Between 1989 and 2016, according to a report published in the journal PLOS One, the biomass of flying insects captured in Germany decreased by a seasonal average of 76 percent. Wild insects are elementary parts of a functioning ecosystem: the insects bury animal dung, prey on pests and pollinate plants.

Science and art are equally concerned by methods of observation. The mediality, materiality and craft like aspects are prominent in both, but the approaches of science and art differ in the way they act and reflect upon the data. Nature is continuously changing. Phenomena emerge within the physical and material processes of observation, measurement and recording, only to fall again outside the scope of human cognition. The study of the real world calls for interaction, dialogue and imagination. Ontological research into the conditions of visibility is highly relevant from both ecological and social perspectives.





## Something to exhibit at the Research Pavilion in Venice



We propose a site-specific installation that makes use of the spatial characteristics of the Sala del Camino and its immediate surroundings (the courtyard). The indoor and outdoor space is transformed into an insect observatory that highlights acts of empathic looking and listening.

The exhibition would consist of the following elements or combinations of them. (1–5) installations by Närhinen and (6) an audio walk performance by Kokkonen.

1

### ***The Malaise Trap***

An optical light installation, including a miniature floral garden (pots with honey plants placed outside in the courtyard)

The work transforms René Malaise's inventive trap design into a collective viewing device and a symbolic light trap that catches the eye and optically mediates the scale and size of an insect to a human observer.

In entomology, the "Malaise traps" are used for harvesting insects passing a chosen location. The tent-like structure funnels them into a collecting vessel: insects fly inside the tented fabric, which again directs them towards a jar filled with ethanol. In our exhibition, no insects will be trapped. Instead, the tips of the tented funnels are equipped with a slide viewer replacing the collecting jar of an entomological malaise trap. Each slide viewer contains dead insects spattered against glass slides and fluorescent lights are placed inside the trap(s). Peeping in a slide viewer, the spectator faces the remains of an insect as if it was squashed against the windshield of a vehicle.



2

## **Wing Beats – Karaoke Booth for Insect** *Hommage to Olavi Sotavalta*

Sound installation including the Karaoke Booth used for recording

The work is inspired by the Finnish entomologist Olavi Sotavalta, who in a 1952 paper in *Nature* presented the idea of an auditory approach for identifying insect species. Sotavalta had the rare gift of absolute pitch. He describes the uses of his heuristic “acoustic method”, and theorises about the subtleties of the wingbeats: how much energy it consumes, and how it varies according to air pressure and body size. The sound installation is based on reversed binaural audio effect. Audio recordings of flying insects are collected using a pair of stereo microphones faced against each other and placed on opposite sides of the Karaoke Booth (14x14 cm). The buzz produced by the wings is played back through headphones. As a result, the (reversed) binaural audio effect simulates the practically impossible and surreal experience where an insect would be buzzing inside a person’s head.

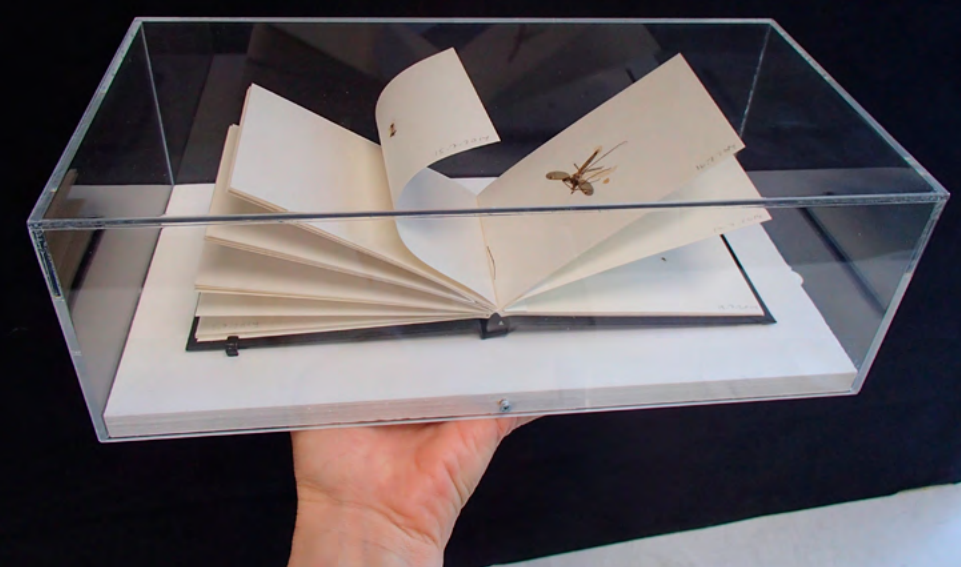
3

## **Nature morte – Natural Causes of Death**

Collages of found objects with magnifying glasses showcasing the beauty and fragility of insects

In nature, dead insects vanish rapidly in the food chain. They end up eaten by birds, frogs, fishes and. *Nature morte* exhibits a broken food chain where dead insects (as well as some insect eaters) are shown embalmed by a mortician and placed on silk and satin in lavishly furnished coffins or alternatively in cheap cardboard boxes. The small coffins are made of former jewellery boxes, eyeglass cases and other packages of branded luxury items. In the exhibition, the small coffins are presented illuminated and solemnly protected by vitrines placed on high plinths that meet the eye level.





4

### ***Diaries of a Serial Killer***

An installation of sketch books used as swatters

Everyone kills insects for self-protection and to stop them flying around the house. The swatting happens automatically and goes unnoticed. For many years, Närhinen has used artist's sketch books to eliminate the unwanted intruders. The collection of swatter books documents the everyday act of killing. The black archives of the Serial Killer reveal the surprising brutality of the quotidian practice.

The books are presented opened and tightly protected by vitrines. The book leaves are bent and arranged in a way that they bear resemblance to winged beings at flight.

5

### ***Memorial to an Earth Worm***

An outdoor installation connected to the miniature flower garden (see the Malaise Trap)

The art work consists of a grave stone in black granite (30x50x3 cm) with the inscription *Lumbricus Terrestris*. The conceptual piece pays homage to an underappreciated underground object – the common earth worm. The hard work of the worms is a pre-condition for life. Earth worms take care of the soil that feeds us. This fact reminds me of the macabre lyrics my late mother used to quote. The Finnish song writer Alfred J. Tanner's grim verse ends: "[..] the last door to open is the worm's mouth." (original in Finnish: "[..] madon suu on viimeinen ovi.") Spot on and good to keep in mind.

6

### ***On Turning to a Bug***

An audio walk performance by Kokkonen

The work consists of audio recordings and walks in the surrounding of the Research Pavilion. The recordings are compiled of text fragments inspired by Kafka's *Metamorphosis* that processes the experience of becoming a bug and being a bug in one's everyday life. Fragments are read by an actor and they form a short radio play. The audio file will be available on the Uniarts website (or elsewhere) for uploading to personal mobile phone.

LUMBRICUS  
TERRESTRIS

★14.6.2018 Espoo  
† 2.9.2018 Espoo





Närhinen and Kokkonen: Proposal for Research Pavilion #3 in Venice 2019

## Something to discuss

### Insects + (human) ecology

Kokkonen's research plunges into the themes of dehumanization and challenges our present understanding of the human condition. Literature (Kafka) and theories by Foucault, Guattari provide tools for discussing the impact of power in society.

Neither is natural science unaffected by emotions, history or power relations. Aspects of violence, killing and death turn out in various combinations connected to Närhinen's project as well. Case studies presented by the entomologists Malaise and Sotavalta bring up surprising facts. E.g. Sotavalta devised his remarkable method in wartime Finland. He spent the years between 1939 and 1945 listening to the quiet buzz of insects. While other men of his age perished fighting on the front line, Sotavalta and his bugs retreated to the summer cottage and stayed alive. Whereas Malaise's trap killed the bugs collected, it offered a unique solution for silent and undercover stand-by observations that revealed the existence of previously unknown creatures.

The discussion gathers physical and metaphorical, dead or living insects together to serve as catalysts for discussing human ecology in its broadest possible meaning. A minor discursive event (e.g. a presentation to other RP3-cells) could be arranged on site in connection to the exhibition. For the sake of ecology, equality and economy, we prefer online discussion platforms (such as Research Catalogue) and virtual networking to symposiums or conferences with invited speakers.

### **Potential outcomes, project documentation and publication in frame of the RP3**

Närhinen and Kokkonen are both experienced artists-researchers in their fields (visual art / performance) and their respective approaches share elements of empathy, imagination and performativity. However, they have not worked together before. A collaboration within the insect project could contribute to a cross-pollination of the social and the ecological perspectives that leads the way towards thinking beyond dichotomies such as individual/society or subjective/objective. The research could make the subjective manifest in scientific objectivity (entomological studies) and bring out the social in the experience of an individual (Kafka).

A documentation of the exhibited works including research papers written by the authors would be published either in RC or in printed format or both.





Närhinen and Kokkonen: Proposal for Research Pavilion #3 in Venice 2019

## Funding plan

Estimated production cost:

- Närhinen's installations (including material costs such as the acrylic vitrines, slide viewers, a malaise trap, the manufacturing of the grave stone etc.) 1700 euros
- Kokkonen's performance (including voice actor's fee, translations, recording studio costs, programming fee for online audio services) 1500 euros

The list of production costs does not include transports or exhibition infrastructure such as lights, pedestals, tables or (audio)technical devices.

In addition to the production costs we require artist's fees for Kokkonen and Närhinen equivalent to the amount of the fee paid for an RP3-"shifter"/switchboard member + travel costs covered for both artists.

The budget for launching an online discursive forum on the subject of "Insects and (human) ecology" is to be negotiated separately.

In case our proposal would be selected as part of the RP3 exhibition, we rely fully on the funding allocated by the exhibition commissioners and provided by the UNI-ARTS. The authors of this proposal have professional expertise in making artworks and producing the discursive content but we are not part-time producers. Working as artist-researchers, the authors are already obligated to apply funding for several other targets (such as research projects, the translation of Kokkonen's upcoming monograph at Palgrave Macmillan etc.). Hence, regarding the estimated costs and the artists fees listed above, it is beyond our possibilities to raise funds for the realization of an exhibition commissioned by UNIARTS or to apply for external support to implement this research plan.

**Tuula Närhinen** b. 1967 in Helsinki, Finland. Lives and works in Helsinki

**Studies:** University of the Arts Helsinki: Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA), 2016  
Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Master of Fine Arts 1986-90 (BA), 1996-99 (MA)  
Helsinki University of Technology, M.Sc. (Archit.), 1990-98

**Solo exhibitions:**

2013 Bokeh, Kunsthalle Studio, Helsinki, Finland  
2013 The Touch of Rain, Kluuvi Gallery, Helsinki, Finland  
2011 Animalcams, The Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki  
2010 Océan plastique, Institut finlandais, Paris, France  
2009 Liplatus - Clapotis, Gallery Sculptor, Helsinki, Finland  
2005 Frostiana - Pictures of the Cold, Gallery Huuto, Helsinki, Finland  
2004 Solarium – Photochemical Experiments in Nature. Kluuvi gallery, Helsinki, Finland  
2003 Wind Experiments, Mikkeli Photographic Centre, Mikkeli, Finland  
2002 Chromatograms of Plant Colours, Studio, Kunsthalle, Helsinki  
1998 Odysseus i Helsingfors/ Ulysses in Helsinki, Galleriet Pineapple, Malmö, Sweden  
1997 Three Stories of Girls: Heidi, Alice, Zazie, Lönnström Art Museum, Rauma, Finland  
1996 Three Stories of Girls: Heidi, Alice, Zazie, Gallery Bulevardi 22 B, Helsinki, Finland  
1988 Solo exhibition, The Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland

**Commissions / Public Art Works:**

2017 *Shadows of the Night*, parks and pedestrian walkways in Leinelä, Vantaa, Finland  
2015 *Animation*, Leinelä Railway Station, Vantaa, Finland  
2007 *Xylothèque*, Finnish Parliament House, Helsinki, Finland  
2006 *Wunderkammer*, Kuusiluoto High School, Oulu, Finland  
2003 *Fossils of the Kluuvi Bay*, Copper lines in the Pavement of Aleksanterinkatu, Helsinki, Finland

**Competitions:**

2012 2. prize at the international Helene Schjerfbeck -memorial competition, Tammisaari, Finland  
2007 4.-6.- prize in Jussinmäki sculpture competition, Hyvinkää, Finland  
2007 Honorary Mention in Espoo City sculpture competition, Finland  
2005 First prize in the artwork competition of the new Annex of the Finnish Parliament House, Helsinki

**Works in collections:**

Helsinki City Art Museum, Kiasma Collection, Finnish State Art Commission

**Publications/ Research articles:**

Tuula Närhinen: "Catch the eye and take a deep look. Sounding Echoes of Binocularity". Tiede & edistys, 4/ 2017  
Tuula Närhinen: *Natural Art and Visual Science*. Doctoral Thesis in Fine Art. University of the Arts Helsinki, 2016  
Eija Aarnio: "From the Sublime to a Sense of Disorientation". *Elements*, Kiasma Exhibition Catalogue, 2015  
Tuula Närhinen: "Viiman vedot: Tuulipiirturin tarina - taiteen tavat, tieteen taustat". *Viivan filosofia* toim. Heikkilä & Johansson, Kuvataideakatemia, 2014.  
Tuula Närhinen: *Works 2000-2009*. Author's edition, 100 pages, 2009. ISBN 978-952-92-6694-4  
Paul Kahn: "Detritus Art and Marine Pollution". *NEWmagazine*4, Kahn+Associates, 2008  
Tuula Närhinen: "Plastic Ocean", *NEWmagazine*4, Kahn+Associates, 2008  
Hanna Johansson: "Phenomena in Tuula Närhinen's Artistic Practice." *Phenomena*. Pori Art Museum 90, 2008  
Tuula Närhinen: "There are no photographs of the wind", *NEWmagazine*3, Kahn+Associates, 2007  
Eija Aarnio: "The Disintegrating Landscape". *Maisema/Landscape*, Kiasma Exhibition Catalogue, 2006  
*The World of Objects*. Exhibition Catalogue, Kunshalle, Helsinki and Tampere Art Museum, 2004  
Susanna Santala: "Documenting the Invisible and the Vanishing", *Frame News*, 1/2003

**Group exhibitions:**

2018 Maritime Poetics, Corner College, Zürich, Switzerland  
2018 Supermarket Art Fair, Stockholm, Sweden  
2017 The 8th Turku Biennial, Turku, Finland  
2017 State of the Art, Kemi and Aine Art Museums, Kemi and Tornio, Finland  
2017 Art Taarasti - a summer exhibition, Taarasti Art Center, Nastola, Finland  
2017 SPLICE - Re-examining Nature, Oulu Art Museum, Oulu, Finland  
2016 Hidden Art – Dold Konst, Malmö, Sweden  
2016 Intimenta, Galerie Une poussière dans l'oeil, Lille, France  
2016 Elements - works from Kiasma's collections, Kiasma, Helsinki  
2015 Waterscapes - Wasserlandschaften, Stadtgalerie Kiel, Germany  
2015 The University of the Arts Helsinki: 1<sup>st</sup> Reseach Pavilion "Experimentality", Venice, Italy  
2015 Hidden Art – Dold Konst, Malmö, Sweden  
2015 Intimenta, Galerie Une poussière dans l'oeil, Lille, France  
2015 Elements - works from Kiasma's collections, Kiasma, Helsinki  
2015 Checkpoint Leonardo, Oulu Art Museum, Oulu, Finland  
2014 GYRE – The Plastic Ocean, Anchorage Museum, Alaska, USA  
2014 Ecological Fallacy, Helsinki Photography Biennial, Finland  
2013 Out to Sea? The Plastic Garbage Project. TR 1, Tampere, Finland  
2012 Prima materia. Art & Science collaboration at Helsinki University Think Corner, Helsinki, Finland  
2012 Quand les Nymphes parlent des Nymphes. Artboretum, Argenton sur Creuse, France  
2011 Landscape Experiences - Tunne maisema. Jyväskylä Museum of Art, Jyväskylä, Finland  
2011 Océan, climat et nous. Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, Paris, France  
2011 Water - Sense and Sensation. Wäinö Aaltonen Museum of Art, Turku, Finland  
2011 Alice in Wonderland. Logomo, Turku, Finland  
2011 Nature Gives – Nature Takes. K.H. Renlund's Museum, Kokkola and Kajaani Art Museum  
2010 Nature Gives – Nature Takes/ Luonto antaa - luonto ottaa, Salo Art Museum, Salo, Finland  
2010 Naturalia. Villa Roosa, Orimattila, Finland  
2010 On the Pasture - Laitumella. Hyvinkää Art Museum, Hyvinkää, Finland  
2008 North–East–West: NEW. Galerie Lavignes, Paris, France.  
2008 Roskaviikot / Trash Art. Hyvinkää Art Museum, Hyvinkää, Finland.  
2008 Resilience – Changing Matters. Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden.  
2008 Phenomena. Pori Art Museum, Pori, Finland  
2008 New-Nature-Knowledge/ Uusi-luonto-tieto. Forum Box, Helsinki, Finland  
2006 Landscape. Works in collections, Kiasma, Helsinki, Finland  
2006 I am not alone here – Four Directions in Photography, Gallery Hippolyte, Helsinki, Finland  
2005 'Tracing Animals' in Muu18years Exhibition. Kunsthalle, Helsinki, Finland  
2004 The World of Objects, Kunshalle, Helsinki and Tampere Art Museum, Tampere, Finland  
2002 Helsinki – Bryssel, The White Hall / Valkoinen sali, Helsinki, Finland  
2002 Helsinki – Bryssel, Maison de l'Art Actuel des Chartreux, Brussels, Belgium  
2002 'Be good' – Works from the Collections, Helsinki City Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland  
2002 Fourth Triennial of Photographic Art – OFF SKENE, Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki  
2000 Water Aesthetics, International Conference on Environmental Aesthetics, Rantasalmi, Finland  
2000 West Wind – Wind Experiments on Harakka Island, Finnish-Norwegian Exhibition, Helsinki  
1992 Rajoilla/On Borders, Art of the Region (Uusimaa & Greater Helsinki), Cable Factory, Helsinki  
1992 Bastard Gallery, (with Tiina Ketara, Teemu Mäki & Marjatta Oja), a rented apartment, Helsinki  
1992 Turun keikka, Gallery Bellarte, Turku, Finland  
1990 Master Degree Exhibition, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland  
1989 Second Biennale of European Art Schools, Antwerp, Belgium  
1986 Nuorten näyttely / Annual Exhibition of Young Artists, Kunsthalle, Helsinki, Finland