



Gotland 15.9.2022

Dear Vincent,

I have spent a couple of days now on this large island off the East coast of Sweden in the middle of the Baltic Sea. The climate seems a bit milder than in the Finnish archipelago, even mulberry trees thrive here. The last ice age has also left different traces in this landscape - rather than bare granit, the island is formed out of limestone, the land doesn't rise here as much, the sea wind tastes a little saltier.

It is strange to stand on the island shore with no other islands in sight. I am clearly more of an archipelago than an island dweller. But this sense of boundlessness of water reveals the limits of my perception. This postcard depicts a painting I saw in a church on a small isle of Fårö, cut off the main island with a narrow stretch of water. Its beaches have performed as stages for numerous films since Bergman set some of his human dramas here. The painting tells the story of seal hunters, who were carried out to sea on a piece of ice. They survived eating raw seal meat and reached the mainland of Sweden after being adrift for many days. In the painting the ice float forms the centre stage, while the sea is dwarfed by humans and the medieval city of Visby.

Just outside the old town walls, I sit on one of the large round grey stones that have been placed in a carefully

choreographed random arrangement by the seashore. There is a walkway along the beach, with benches facing the sea. I wonder if the sea is the first - and perhaps the last - scene that we pause and gather to view, to witness? The stone seat feels cold, with none of the softness of the smooth flat pebbles of white limestone along the water's edge. I realise it is cast of cement. There have been stone quarries on the island since time immemorial, and these days they feed a large cement industry. Expansion of extraction is threatening the ground water, which is getting increasingly scarce on the island. It hardly rained at all this summer, I am told. Nearly all of the vast bogs have been drained.

In the local museum, I was shown some 5000 year old huge cod bones and handcarved fishing hooks. The cod must have been thriving here then. Now their population in the Baltic has collapsed. In the museum archive there is also a majestic whale bone that used to be revered as a relic of a mythical female giant that according to a legend arose from the sea and founded the city. The limestone has its own stories to tell of the past. I find my first ever fossil, a small rock with tiny imprints of shells on it. Traces of life in the warm shallow waters here over 400 million years ago. Origin myths washed ashore. Past futures and future pasts stored in stone, shaped by the changing seas.

Island greetings, Taru